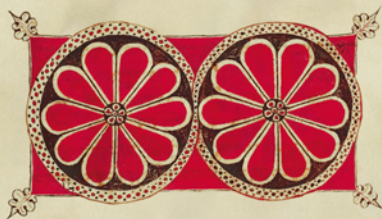




*Abraham
as Spiritual Ancestor*

A POSTCOLONIAL ZIMBABWEAN READING
OF ROMANS 4



ISRAEL KAMUDZANDU

BRILL

Abraham as Spiritual Ancestor

Biblical Interpretation Series

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By
Israel Kamudzandu



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This book is dedicated to my late parents, Rev. Elijah and prophetess – faith healer Esinath Kamudzandu whose spirits continue to inspire my work on Spiritual ancestors and ancestresses. To my wife Rutendo and my girls, Zvikomborero and Tendai, this book is the result of their sacrifices and for all the support they offer.

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PREFACE

Ancestors and Genealogies are part of a people's spirituality and faith. It is fitting that, Aeneas and Abraham must be considered in the exegesis and commentary of Pauline theology. The Epistle to Romans was addressed to Christians in the heart of the Roman Empire of the Julio—Claudian Emperors, who then were benefactors of the world, needs to be considered in the dynamics of postcolonial biblical interpretation. Conflicts over ethnic identities and racial tensions in and outside of the 'ecclesia' will be held to a minimum if readers would think intentionally about Paul's concern in the Epistle to the Romans. I hope my readers both in Southern Africa and in North America will pay attention to the importance of ancestors in the field of New Testament Interpretation.

This book has five foci. The question of methodology—designated as because of the juxtaposition of Aeneas and Abraham, preoccupies the introductory section. The next three chapters are concerned with the ideological, political, religious and social construction of ancestors in the New Testament and its cultural contexts. Too often the Church and its practitioners have not paid attention to the recognition that religious ideologies and all world views are contextually conditioned. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was quick to notice how the Augustan propaganda was shaping people's lives and Romans was written as a counter ideology to that of Greeks and Romans

The project is conversant with the relevant literature of both Greco-Roman historians such as Virgil, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Tacitus, Livy, Philo and Josephus, and the postcolonial work of authors like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Sugirtharajah, Fernando Segovia, Vincent Wimbush, Musa Dube, and Mercy Amba Oduyoye. However, the scope of the book goes ahead of most of the postcolonial in two major areas. First, the book offers contextualized background in which Pauline theology and exegesis was formed. Secondly, the book is the only one that juxtaposes both Aeneas and Abraham as ancestors who were endowed with a divine mission. The crucial part in juxtaposing these two founding ancestors offers New Testament readers an opportunity to revisit Christianity as multi-ethnic religion.

This book belongs to all who are concerned with the future and growth of Christianity in the 21st century global world.

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I am thankful to God who rescued and guided my steps from the jungles, battle zones, dust roads, villages, and cities of Zimbabwe. I am grateful to my late mother, Esinath Kamudzandu, for her encouragement, prayers, and support during painful years of war and controlled education. I deeply appreciate the spirit of my late father that kept me focused in difficult times and challenges during my school years. To my wife, Rutendo, and daughters Zvikomborero and Tendai, I offer my heartfelt gratitude for their love, support, patience, and advice throughout my graduate education and writing of this book. My sincere gratitude to my late father-in-law, Enoch Chiunda, and mother-in-law, Beatrice Chiunda, for their continued support and prayers when we made a transition to the United States of America.

I am grateful to a number of colleagues and friends who have offered both encouragement and financial support at various stages of my education and stay in the United States. These people include my mentor, the Rev. Dr. Jaime Potter-Miller, John and Carol Parsons, Joan Negley, Rev. Warren Jones, Rev. Henry Brooks, June Johnson, Melba Davis, Royce Victor, Dr. Thomas Boomershine, and Amelia Cooper. Thanks are especially due to Dr. Carolyn Osiek and Dr. David Balch, who not only taught me at Brite Divinity School, but also graciously provided a substantial financial grant to enable me write my language exams and complete my comprehensive examinations.

In addition, I am indebted to Dr. David Balch for his patience, encouragement, and valuable suggestions throughout the writing of this book. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Larry Welborn who graciously gave of his time and depth of insight in reading and correcting the entire manuscript in draft form. My entire dissertation committee was a real blessing, I could not have asked for a more helpful academic team to assist me in bringing this work to completion.

I deeply appreciate the work of my proofreaders and editors, Martha Bernard and Sherry Wright, who diligently read and corrected every sentence and paragraph of this work. I also want to express appreciation to the library personnel at Texas Christian University, Wright State University, University of Dayton, Cincinnati University, and United Theological Seminary for their invaluable assistance.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the unflagging love and desire of my father, Rev. Elijah Kamudzandu, who went to be with the Lord before I even started elementary education. I also acknowledge the prayers and love of my mother, Prophetess Esinath Kamudzandu, who also went to be with the Lord before I completed my graduate work. Although I cannot physically see them, I feel their saintly presence in my life and education. Through the years, these two have been models of what it means to authentically live out the gospel in a cross-cultural manner. I humbly and lovingly dedicate this book to my parents—my ancestors who are in heaven.

INTRODUCTION

The impetus for writing this book arises out of my own journey of faith and service as a pastor in the United Methodist Church. I am a Shona from Zimbabwe trained largely by North American professors. As an African pastor from a Third-World country, I have lived with an exegesis handed down from the West, yet grappled with the desire to communicate the gospel within the context of the Shona culture of Zimbabwe.

Thus, I began to pose my own cultural, anthropological, and political questions: Is it possible to be both African and Christian? What does the New Testament say about being colonized, about suffering, and oppression? What theological resources does the Bible have for our encounter with dehumanizing/colonial powers? What is the relationship between the Christian Scriptures and the stories of sub-Saharan Africans? Is it wrong for Africans to honor their ancestors? What aspects of the Shona culture are relevant in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ? Postcolonially, can Shona people preach the gospel within their worldview?

My hunger to answer these questions caused me to listen afresh to the ancestor language in Romans 4:1–25. For the Christian message to be meaningful, people must hear it in language and categories that make sense within their particular culture. The gospel must be cross-cultural—that is, it must come alive in a language that makes sense to its audience, while challenging it at the deepest level.

The discipline of study known as biblical interpretation, or the science of discerning how a thought or event in one cultural context may be understood in a different cultural context, has been dominated by Euro-American thought and procedure. If we do an honest assessment of who has written and advocated for other methods of interpretation, we discover that it has traditionally been Euro-American male scholars. This book seeks to remind readers that the Bible is not a culturally Euro-American document; rather, the Bible originated within the culture of the Mediterranean world. Hence, cross-cultural¹ hermeneutics is a fitting methodology to use in reading Scripture.

¹ The term “cross-cultural” in this book refers to the manner in which one enters a foreign culture with the hope of contextualizing the gospel in such a way that the gospel becomes part of the indigenous people.

The historical-critical method has for 350 years contributed enormously to biblical interpretation by illuminating distinctive ways in which ancient Mediterranean people spoke and wrote, the historical context in which communication happened, and the concrete situations mentioned in the texts. However, the historical-critical method does not address cultural and ideological views. Since the historical-critical method is a child of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, it does not always reveal connections between the past and the present of traditional cultures. Its weakness is its lack of attention to social, economic, and political issues which are important in biblical interpretation.²

The Enlightenment aimed at bracketing out the presence of the supernatural in the Bible.³ The views of the Enlightenment are represented by Descartes whose radical separation of body and mind constrained the way scholars have read the Bible for 500 years. Though his methodology helped in the development of science and modern thought, Descartes' dichotomy has obscured the dynamics at work in the texts of many ancient authors, especially Paul.⁴ Descartes' dichotomy obscures the importance of Abraham for most modern readers of Paul because Abraham is understood only as a *prototype* of the new humanity in Christ, and his status as an *ancestor* in religion is bracketed out.

This work addresses Paul's appropriation of Abraham as a spiritual ancestor in Romans 4 in the context of the Roman appropriation of Aeneas as an ancestor of Greeks and Romans. Paul builds upon an apologetic tradition in Hellenistic Judaism, and interacts with an ideological trend in early Roman imperialism, which found in the tradition of Aeneas a basis for reconciling Greeks and Romans. Thus, Paul's portrayal of Abraham as an ancestor of Jews and Greeks alike is an ideological construct analogous to one familiar to his Roman audience.

² Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 2001), 19.

³ Justin S. Ukpong, "Inculturation Hermeneutics: An African Approach to Biblical Interpretation," in *The Bible in World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 24.

⁴ Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 6.

Yet, by asserting that Abraham the Jew, rather than Aeneas the Roman, is the ancestor of the people of faith (*fides*), Paul constructs a liberating counter-ideology, the effect of which was to subvert the basis of Roman power. Thus, a bold assertion of the importance of Zimbabwean ancestors finds its warrant in Paul's construction of Abraham as spiritual ancestor against the background of Roman imperial politics.

Consequently, Paul's letter to the Romans may be used to empower postcolonial Christians to embrace their cultural and political history in constructing models of kinship for a new spiritual family. The New Testament provides readers with oral stories of cross-cultural appropriations, particularly in the Gospels, in Acts, and in Pauline letters. Christianity, from its start as a Jewish sect, proclaimed a universal faith in a way that engaged other cultures.

Cross-cultural hermeneutics seeks to reclaim a traditional understanding of ancestors in Africa and the ancient world as a way to understand Paul's treatment of Abraham. Its main agenda is to make the message of the Bible alive in the contemporary Shona⁵ context. Cross-cultural hermeneutics includes "the theories, strategies, practices, and results of interpreting the Bible self-consciously out of one's cultural location."⁶ Thus, African culture and religion become not just preparation for the gospel, but indispensable resources in the interpretation of the gospel and in the development of African spirituality.

The Bible is not a neutral document. It is the word of God in human language; thus human culture—with its ideology, worldview, and values—is intertwined with God's word.⁷ This raises the need for a cross-cultural hermeneutical approach in line with love and respect for others, justice, peace, and unity. Thus, cross-cultural hermeneutics will help interpreters appropriate a document's ancient meaning for a contemporary context. This hermeneutical method seeks to empower oral readers for critical study of texts in relation to their political,

⁵ The word 'Shona' in this book refers to the Bantu African group who, because of the colonial boundaries imposed by the British colonialists, are mainly found in Zimbabwe. The word Zimbabwe is translated "the house of stones." See S. J. Hannan, *Standard Shona Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1994), 465.

⁶ David Rhoads, ed., *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 4.

⁷ Ukpong, "Inculturation Hermeneutics," 18.

religio-cultural,⁸ economic, and tribal transformation. This methodology is concerned with linking the biblical text to the reader's cultural context.

The historical-critical method is a fundamental tool for understanding the past, but it cannot adequately deal with culture, ideology, and symbol. As the gospel of Jesus shifts to Third-World nations, there must be "more adequate explicit models of interpretation, validated or invalidated by a broad and large number of tests and application."⁹ The interpreter must engage a biblical text in dialogue with a contextual cultural experience and situate the text's meaning in the life of ordinary people. A case in point is that of the people of Zimbabwe whose lives are marked by wounds of colonization, neocolonization, AIDS, hunger, unemployment, and inflation; here the Bible should adequately address their needs.

The Bible contains ancient cultural configurations which add to its meaning, so the Bible cannot function unless it is interpreted. The interpreter strives to make the original meaning of the text meaningful to contemporary readers. I intend to bring before the contemporary reader the world of Greco-Roman culture and the function of ancestors in that culture. Cross-culturally, I want explicitly to interpret the text from the language that expresses Shona context. This cultural perspective will help readers appropriate Paul's use of Abraham as a spiritual ancestor in Romans 3:27–4:1–25.

My interpretive method involves examining the textual, iconographic, and numismatic evidence in Romans from a cross-cultural hermeneutic that considers the social, political, and ideological function of ancestors in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's time and in the Shona Christian world of postcolonial Zimbabwe. This hermeneutic values the relationship between the 'self' and the 'other.' More importantly, it values the contexts, audiences, experiences, and worldviews of other cultures. The aim of employing this hermeneutic is to propose a new way to translate early Christian faith into other languages and cultures. Scholars from Third-World nations have found that "Euro-American methods have interpreted the Bible with a domineering, middle-class, white lens that has pushed other culturally determined

⁸ 'Religio-culture' in this book indicates the close connection between the religion and the culture of the traditional and postcolonial Shona people.

⁹ Bruce J. Malina, "Religion in the World of Paul," *BTB* (1986): 92.

readings to the interpretive margins.”¹⁰ I seek to resist this method by proposing a hermeneutic that considers the context and cultures of others who have been marginalized by those in power.

This cross-cultural hermeneutic makes Africans the subject of interpretation. From this cross-cultural outlook, Western biblical interpretation appears as an intellectualist quest for an objective universal truth. This is a result of the anthropological oversight of New Testament scholars who, for 350 years, have sought to interpret the Bible from a Euro-American perspective. By contrast, cross-cultural hermeneutics is existential and pragmatic in nature, and contextual in approach.

Although missionaries to Zimbabwe did a great deal, they missed the centrality of a culturally sensitive gospel. The results of their evangelism had consequences on two fronts. First, indigenous people were required to abandon their culture in order to embrace Western values of thought, dress, speech, and worship. Second, the Zimbabweans’ cultural worth and dignity were undermined. The premise was that the African should leave his heathen cultural modes and move into “Western civilized” ways when accepting Christianity.¹¹ Thus, the indigenous populace could not appropriate the gospel into their own culture.

What missionaries modified was an indigenous sense of identity rooted in ancestor veneration. As a result, the Zimbabweans’ link to antiquity was broken. Tradition was rejected, values and artifacts were deemed heathen and wicked, and the African sense of self-awareness was rendered opaque. Christianity was deemed inseparable from Euro-Americanism. The result of this colonial domination was that anything African was labeled evil, syncretistic, and non-Christian. Ancestor veneration was deemed evil, yet the Bible and even the Roman Catholic Church has high regard for venerating saints/ancestors of faith.

This book seeks to establish a cross-cultural appropriation of the role of ancestors, by drawing similarities between Paul’s world and the world of the Shona people. On the basis of socio-historical and cross-cultural investigations of the texts, I will argue that Paul puts forth a new definition of God for a universal humanity, thus making a cross-cultural reading of Romans possible. Paul also offers a new definition

¹⁰ Brian K. Blount, “The Witness of Active Resistance: The Ethics of Revelation in African American Perspective,” in *From Every People and Nation*, ed. David Rhoads (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 28.

¹¹ See Ralph E. Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary* (Westwood, NJ: F. H. Revell Company, 1960), 44–53.

of God's people as descended from Abraham, no longer on the basis of ethnic distinctions or righteous deeds, but on the basis of Abraham's faith in the true God.¹² Paradoxically, Paul depicts Abraham's faith over and against his works, thus engaging Israel's first generic patriarch in a decidedly new way. Indeed, Paul radically reshapes what it now means to be a descendent of Abraham. As Žizek puts it, "Paul elevated Christianity from a Jewish sect into a universal religion (religion of universality)."¹³

This book will show that the paradigm for Paul's use of "Abraham our forefather"¹⁴ to reconcile Jews and Gentiles is found in Greek and Roman writers of the first-century B.C.E. (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Virgil, and Livy) who used Aeneas as ancestor as a vehicle to reconcile Greeks and Romans.¹⁵ By the time of Augustus, the experience of Aeneas was identified with those of the Trojans in general. Aeneas was adopted over Odysseus, because the latter lacked the aura of sacredness and had a reputation for calculating shrewdness.¹⁶

I hope this study will not only provide a stronger biblical interpretation in Africa, but will also contribute to a cross-cultural understanding of the Bible. The ancestors have to be recognized in the African

¹² See Wolfgang Stegemann, "The Emergence of God's New People: The Beginnings of Christianity Reconsidered," who argues that "unlike the many other ancient peoples, the Christianoi as God's people share no common genealogical descent from a common ancestor. Instead, they were connected through fictive kinship, which means that they belonged to the household of God (*familia dei*) and ultimately traced their birth to and from God (baptism as symbolic (re-)birth)," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi: Come è nato il Cristianesimo* 21/2 (Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori delle Religioni, 2004), 497–615. See also Robert Jewett, *Romans: Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 268–322.

¹³ Slavoj Žizek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 10. See also Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003).

¹⁴ Rom 4:1–25.

¹⁵ This reconciliation paradigm is given poignancy by Arnaldo Momigliano in his book, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987). On page 264 he states that "Virgil, managed to turn the image of the Trojan Aeneas into a symbol of friendship between Greeks and Romans. Aeneas remained specifically the symbol of reconciliation between Greeks and Romans, and never became a generic symbol of friendship between the various peoples of the Roman Empire." While Momigliano's point is valid, we should not forget that various Roman families claimed Aeneas long before Virgil. But Virgil changed the meaning of this claim. See T. P. Wiseman, *The Myths of Rome* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 16–8.

¹⁶ G. Karl Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 10–1.

context not as rivals of Jesus, but rather as part of the community governed by Jesus Christ.

Plan of the Book

I begin by providing definitions of culture, ideology, and ancestor, then developing a methodological framework that draws on the traditions of the past in terms of the role of ancestors in Paul's world. This cross-cultural hermeneutic builds on socio-historical inquiries and brings before the reader the idea that subjects who make up the social world of antiquity were always embedded in genealogy and in historical traditions. These traditions are worthy of investigation so as to liberate the gospel of Jesus to other cultures. Human beings who were in contact with Paul were part of a rich political/historical world, not just spectators of it. Historical traditions, and the complex clusters of meaning and values handed down from earlier generations were the core of their being. Hence, Aeneas as a social construct compared with the figure of Abraham becomes a crucial factor in reading Romans 4.

Chapter one establishes Aeneas as a cultural artifact and possible paradigm for Paul's construal of Abraham in Romans 4. In this chapter I discuss the role Aeneas played as a founding parent of the Greco-Roman people. This chapter aims to demonstrate Paul's universal view of Abraham and how his position translates into ancestral language. I analyze Books I to VII of the *Aeneid* to show how Virgil describes the divine guidance which led Aeneas to Italy to establish a new city that gave rise to Rome. The views of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Virgil form a large part of this chapter. Romans 4 does not inform the contemporary reader about the cultural background of ancestors. I show that the story of Aeneas permitted Paul's Greco-Roman audience to make connections within a culture where ancestors shaped identity. The established role of Aeneas as a symbol of reconciliation between Greeks and Romans made it possible for Paul to present Abraham as a spiritual ancestor of all faithful people. This understanding of Paul's purpose resonates well with the ancestral cosmology of the Shona Christians in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Chapter two investigates Abraham in Hellenistic-Jewish traditions, and the world with which Paul was in dialogue. The following questions will be answered: (1) Which traditions influenced Paul, Greco-Roman or Hellenistic-Jewish? and (2) Which traditions are reflected in

Romans 4:1–25 and how do they relate to Paul’s audience? Examining Abraham in the Jewish context builds a link with the reading of ancestors in the Greco-Roman world of the Augustan Age. A discussion of the function of Abraham in intertestamental literature¹⁷ grounds this chapter. The views of Philo and Josephus, Jewish thinkers in the Hellenistic world, are crucial, as they help us understand Paul’s reinterpretation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25. An important aspect of this section will be faith as discussed by Philo and Josephus. The central theme in this section will be Josephus’s and Philo’s presentation of Abraham.

Chapter three pursues the issue of ancestors in precolonial and postcolonial Shona worldviews. A discussion of the Shona world before colonialism and Christianity leads us into the postcolonial world of the Shona Christians in Zimbabwe. In this chapter, I use Justin Ukpong’s heuristic approach to reading the Bible in postcolonial Africa.¹⁸ My goal is to examine traditional Shona religio-culture, and to show how colonization and Western Christianity impacted the postcolonial Shona Christian’s religion and cultural identity. The following questions shape the discussion in this chapter: (1) What are Shona traditional religion and culture? (2) What are some Shona traditional beliefs and rituals? (3) What is the Shona traditional social system and structure? And (4) What are the Shona beliefs about death and dying? Death is not seen as an end to life, but as a passage to the next stage of life.¹⁹

Chapter four examines ancestry and spiritual progeny in Romans 3:21–4:25. This chapter will include a postcolonial Zimbabwean interpretation of Romans, citing the work of new biblical scholars from African cultures who have been educated in the Western world. This

¹⁷ Peter Dalbert, *Die Theologie der Hellenistisch-Judischen Missionsliteratur unter Ausschluss von Philo und Josephus* (Hamburg-Volksdorf: H. Reich, 1954), 148–68; cf. *The Testament of Abraham: The Greek Recensions* (Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 1–89.

¹⁸ Justin S. Ukpong, “Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Boston: Brill, 2001), 11–28. See also Justin S. Ukpong, “Inculturation Hermeneutics: An African Approach to Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Bible in World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics*, ed. Walter Dietrich and Ulrich Luz (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 17–32.

¹⁹ Jacob K. Olupona, *To Praise and Reprimand: Ancestors and Spirituality in African Society and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 52–3.

leads to a delineation of potential implications of a cross-cultural reading of Romans.

The conclusion presents a number of implications of Paul's construction of Abraham for a cross-cultural hermeneutic as it pertains to traditional cultures. This hermeneutic will emphasize the centrality of community in studying and interpreting the Bible. Informed by the cross-cultural world of Paul, this book will establish the need to be sensitive to the traditions of other cultures. Romans 4 is a treasure trove of cross-cultural exegesis; it demonstrates how Paul appropriated the culture of the period and creatively used it to advance the gospel. The Augustan political context which Paul creatively used when he reconstructed Abraham as a new ancestor allows Shona people to reconstruct their heroes such as *Nehanda* and *Chaminuka* as spiritual ancestors. In Romans 4, Paul provides the warrant for bold new definitions of spiritual kinship, thus reactivating the memory of Nehanda whose radical "Yes" finally brought peace and a sense of identity to the Shona people in 1980. In this way, the gospel will be freed to engage the cultural and social world of Shona readers in a way that will allow the indigenous people to be subjects of biblical interpretation.

Lastly, the conclusion will briefly provide the strengths and limitations of this hermeneutic. In taking up this hermeneutic, I stand on the shoulders of many African readers who, after independence, began revisiting the whole issue of Old and New Testament exegesis. Recent studies of the political, cultural, social, and religious environment of the first-century Greco-Roman world have opened new looks at the intriguing interaction between the Pauline studies and culture in the New Testament.

Culture, Ideology, and Ancestor: Working Definitions

The culture I am concerned with is ancient Hellenistic-Roman culture, credited with being the "cradle of Christianity."²⁰ This culture has some elements in common with the culture of the Shona people of Zimbabwe who, for 22 years, have been struggling to define themselves as African Christians after going through bitter colonization and a war (1965–1979) that divided the nation, institutions, families, and African

²⁰ Helmut Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1995), xxxiii.

religion. One common cultural element is the veneration of ancestors²¹ and the role of ancestors in developing a national identity.

As in other disciplines, an anthropological notion of culture sets new directions for biblical interpretation. In postcolonial nations, culture has influenced scholars and preachers to think about the “nature of Christian identity and communal traditions, the relations between social practice on the one hand, and Christian beliefs and symbols on the other,”²² as well as enculturation of the gospel. In fact, both culture and ideology explain how beliefs, values, and attitudes supportive of particular social relations come to be established in everyday life.

The definition of culture appropriate for this book was given by Bruce Malina:

culture refers to a system of collectively shared interpretations of persons, things, and events. It involves symboling persons, things, and events, endowing them with distinctive functions and statuses and situating them within specific time and space frames. The ways in which persons, things, and events are symbolized, endowed with function and statuses, and situated in time and place result in socially appreciable meaning plus emotional anchorage focused on that meaning. Meaning freighted with feeling results in the meaningful.²³

This definition illuminates the cultural world of the Augustan Age in which Aeneas was symbolized as the ancestor of the Greco-Roman people.²⁴ A vivid illustration of the importance of culture is given by Paul Zanker, who wrote that when the Roman Republic finally collapsed in civil war, “people sought an explanation for the widespread sense of dislocation and believed they found it in rejection of the gods and values of their ancestors.”²⁵

²¹ The word ‘ancestor’ in this book means the founder of a given nation.

²² Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), x.

²³ Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 9. See also Rhoads, *From Every People and Nation*, who argues that “cultural interpretation of the Bible includes the theories, strategies, practices, and results of interpreting the Bible self-consciously out of one’s cultural location,” 4.

²⁴ This particular synthesis of Aeneas as a cultural and ideological ancestor is well stated by G. Karl Galinsky in *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3–141. See also Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 6–51.

²⁵ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), 2.

Malina emphasizes that culture entails a system of collectively shared interpretations of persons, things, and events.²⁶ Without culture a nation will lose its identity. Cultures are living realities that change in relation to internal forces and in interaction with external forces. In societies, human beings live within cultural boundaries that help define the 'in' group and the 'out' group. Culture, national identity, social location, and personal perspective are all laden with power dynamics in relation to groups in and out of the culture.²⁷ Those of the in-group share beliefs and values. Thus, cross-cultural interpretation represents a perspective out of one's cultural context and invites dialogue and positive criticism with other cultures.

The cultural matrix generates an ideological perspective. Ideology typically seeks to maintain the status quo. Within a society, ideological lines are drawn, and perspectives are passed on from one generation to the next. Culture maintains boundaries through space and time. It is interesting to note how Rome, in wars of conquest, lost both the Republic and its cultural identity. It is no wonder then, that when Augustus gained power in 31 B.C.E., he intentionally sought a program of cultural reform aimed at moral and spiritual revival.²⁸

Culture and ideology remind people where they have come from and where they are in relation to others. Thus, the ancestor is a cultural construct whose role in society is to give a sense of identity.²⁹ It is hard to erase identities that are culturally maintained and ideologically assimilated. Tampering with these identities means upsetting the status quo. In tribal societies, people have to know where they stand, and they have to know where others fit in as well.³⁰ In this book, the process of navigating culturally contrived and ideologically constructed boundaries is called cross-cultural hermeneutics.

A cultured people are persons who share a set of symbols and have been endowed with an aura of sacredness. In the Greco-Roman and Hellenistic-Roman worlds, these symbols and persons were venerated and remembered in festivals. During the reign of Augustus, the symbol system was revived by Augustus himself, and by authors such as

²⁶ Malina, *Christian Origins*, 9.

²⁷ Rhoads, 5.

²⁸ Zanker, 2–3.

²⁹ For an extensive treatment of social identity theory, see Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 38–9, 171–94.

³⁰ Malina, *Christian Origins*, 10.

Virgil and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (referred to hereafter simply as Dionysius). The *Aeneid* is not just a work of literature like a Shakespearean play, but “patriotism raised to a religion.”³¹ In chapter one I will discuss the role of Aeneas as ancestor. A major element in this book is the role and centrality of ancestors. The Shona cosmology and the cosmology³² of Augustus have similar understandings of the place and function of ancestors.

A cornerstone of the Shona understanding and ordering of community is the pervasive interaction between “the living” and “the living dead.”³³ Since Shona society is a kinship society, Shona ancestors play numerous roles. Ancestors provide a sense of identity and express the political and ideological relationships between families that are not biologically related to one another.³⁴ In political, cultural, religious, and ideological terms, a common ancestor can be established as the founding parent of all the people living in a society.³⁵ Ancestors circumscribe the ancient people, the founders of a kinship group, a community, and even a nation. Existentially, this is the most consistent and demanding and, in terms of ritual, the most comprehensive component of Shona — if not all—African religions.³⁶ Africans cannot visualize life without ancestors, because they believe strongly that ancestors, like the living, play a vital role in society and have a real impact on the community.

Through their traditional beliefs and religious practices, the Shona people express a deep yearning for communion with their departed

³¹ Moses Hadas, *Aeneas and The Tradition of the National Hero* (New York: Columbia University, 1919), 408.

³² ‘Cosmology’ in this book means the way kin groups and people perceive their universe, seen in terms of the past, present, and future, to be outfitted and to function.

³³ M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Interfaith Mission in Earth-Care* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1998), 249.

³⁴ Robert R. Wilson, “Genealogy, Genealogies,” in *ABD*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 929–32.

³⁵ Virgil and Dionysius turned the Trojan Aeneas into a symbol of friendship between Greek and Roman, a symbol present even earlier than Dionysius, as in T. P. Wiseman, *The Myths of Rome* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 20–1.

³⁶ To speak about ancestors in the African language is to elevate Africa’s religious system, which, like other indigenous belief systems in the Mediterranean world, is a pragmatic faith; it espouses a proximate, this-worldly salvation rather than just an other-worldly salvation. African religious systems are community oriented rather than individualistic. See Jacob K. Olupona, “To Praise and Reprimand: Ancestors and Spirituality in African Society and Culture,” in Steven J. Friesen, ed., *Ancestors in Post-Contact Religion: Roots, Ruptures, and Modernity’s Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Divinity School, 2001), 49–63.

grandparents and community founders. The Shona people believe that one's blood relations (as well as communal interpersonal relations) and place of origin have a great impact on one's life. In Shona religion, ancestors mediate between God and humanity. John Mbiti says about ancestors in all African contexts: "They have both feet in both worlds, this world and in the spiritual world."³⁷ *Culture* here refers to the expressions of particular communities of people in relation to the patterns of life—the values, beliefs, and stories or myths that hold a society or ethnic group together. Thus, when praying to God, the Shona people always pray through the ancestors.

Every interpretation of a text must consider people's experiences and commitments. Thus, interpreters should exercise ethical discipline in their reading of texts while in foreign cultures. Cultural interpretation acknowledges that all expressions of Christianity are culturally specific.³⁸ In other words, all Christian values and views of Scripture are embedded in the dynamics of a particular culture.³⁹

Ancestors are viewed in terms of spiritual forces that bring harmony to society. If people ignore or forfeit the ancestors, the social group's meaning and stability are at risk and the equilibrium of ancestral existence in the spirit world is disturbed if the living do not honor their dead ancestors. This interdependence is manifested in rituals of remembrance, marriage, and rainmaking ceremonies. In chapter three I will discuss the Shona cosmology and how the coming of Christianity and colonization destroyed the system of ancestral veneration.

One of the major constituents of culture is language. In the words of Ngugi Wa Thiong, "language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture."⁴⁰ *Culture* in this view embodies those moral, ethical, and aesthetic values—the set of spiritual eyeglasses—through which people come to view themselves and their place in the universe.⁴¹ Cultural values, the basis of a people's identity, are carried by language. Language as culture becomes the memory bank of a people's experience in history.⁴²

³⁷ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 25.

³⁸ Rhoads, 5.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ngugi Wa Thiong, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers, 1986), 14–5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴² Ibid.

Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes it possible.⁴³ This interdependence of culture and language is vital to my analysis of Paul and the interlocutor in Romans 3:27–4:25.

Language mediates between the ‘self’ and the ‘other,’ between people and nature, and between the living and the dead. The language a given culture uses is a subset of all socially contrived symbols, which are embedded in ancestral language. If language makes meaning from a given cultural system, and if the biblical texts are products of language, then to understand the Bible is to understand the meanings of an alien culture. A cross-cultural approach is necessary to interpret the symbolic language of the past to the contemporary world.

The challenge New Testament scholars face is to situate themselves relative to the authors of ancient documents so as to ‘eavesdrop’ on conversations between first-century authors and their audiences. In other words, scholars have to play the role of active listener and strive to understand other cultures in order to interpret the meanings shared by alien peoples. This entails understanding a people’s language, since culture and language are mutual elements.

Additional important words used in this book are cross-cultural, worldview, contextualization, *Res Gestae Augusti*, and faith/fides.⁴⁴ The incarnation of Jesus makes a cross-cultural reading not only possible but an obligation. It establishes a paradigm for God’s redeeming presence in the world today. Images of Abraham are found in most Jewish temples and synagogues in both Palestine and the Greco-Roman world. In the Forum of Augustus we find a list of the founders of Rome: Romulus and the kings, the first founders of Rome, on the one side; on the other Aeneas and his son Iulus, ancestor of the Julian clan and of the kings Alba Longa from whom Romulus descended.⁴⁵ As in Virgil, the ancestral figures looked down with pride upon their descendant Augustus.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The term ‘worldview’ encompasses all of the terms used in this book. For a detailed definition, see Michael Kearney, *Worldview* (Novato, CA: Chandler and Sharp Publishers, Inc., 1984), 41–2. *Res Gestae* refers to the great works and gospel of Augustus. For a fuller description, see P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, eds., *Res Gestae DIVI AUGUSTI: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). A helpful introduction to cross-cultural hermeneutics can be found in Yeo Khiok-kgng (K.K.), ed., *Navigating Romans Through Cultures: Challenging Readings by Charting a New Course* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004).

⁴⁵ See Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome: Classical World Series* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 43–62.

At the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth a series of full-length mosaics of Jesus lines the walls: in one he is Asian, in another African, in another European, in another Latin American. Like any other ancestor, Jesus Christ must be enfleshed in every cultural context. In postcolonial countries of Africa, Jesus must be allowed to enter the bloodstream of every tribe.

My experiences in both Africa and North America have compelled me to grapple first hand with cross-cultural issues. In order to engage the entire world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, scholars must revisit the cultural world of the New Testament and draw connections that will help the modern-day Christian appropriate the word of God cross-culturally. The global scene needs cultural engagement with the Bible. I hope this work will challenge interpreters to do exegesis in new ways within the rich mosaic of contexts in our world. With this in mind, I will now establish the hermeneutic to be used in this book. From a cultural perspective, this hermeneutical method is known as cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics: An Interpretive Strategy

Scholars have discovered that the biblical texts come from and reflect ancient social locations, cultural backgrounds, economic contexts, and political situations.⁴⁶ New Testament scholars have given considerable attention to ancient culture, and clearly the category of culture is indispensable as a context for interpretation. The Hellenistic-Roman world is the cradle of Christianity,⁴⁷ and to ignore that culture would be like a child forgetting the mother who gave birth to him or her. We must establish that Paul was influenced not only by Judaism, but also by the religious, cultural, and political movements of the Greco-Roman world of his time.

New Testament scholars have given insufficient attention to the interpenetration of Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. A cross-cultural hermeneutic will help readers understand the cultures of the first readers of Paul's Epistle to the Romans and how these cultures

⁴⁶ Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Matrix and Canonical Shape," *Theology Today* 42 (1985–1986): 307–21.

⁴⁷ Helmut Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age: Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1995), xxxiii.

influenced Paul. When Paul's gospel crossed over to other cultures of the Greco-Roman world, it had to be shaped to accommodate the language and worldview of its intended audiences.

A cross-cultural hermeneutic is a contextual methodology informed by the culture of ordinary people and their social, political, and religious contexts. The proximate goal is to make Paul's Greco-Roman readers the subjects of biblical interpretation, while the ultimate goal is to make the Shona people the subjects of biblical interpretation. This will be done through "a reflection on ways in which interpreters from diverse cultural and social locations give responsible interpretations of biblical interpretations and responsible appropriations of those writings for relevant contexts in the contemporary world."⁴⁸ The aim is sociocultural transformation focusing on two cultural situations and worldviews.⁴⁹ The ethos of this hermeneutic is that of encouraging cultural diversity in one's reading practices. I contend there is no neutral, value-free interpretation, because all interpretations are culturally based.

Cross-cultural hermeneutics is concerned with appraising the cultural dimension of the Bible in relation to its attitude toward, and evaluation of, other cultures. A second task is to appropriate the Bible's message for a contemporary context. For the Shona, this involves appropriating the message of Paul in terms of the ancestral language of the indigenous people. The major benefit of this hermeneutic is that it makes Africans the subjects of interpretation, and thus analyzes the biblical texts from the perspective of the African people.⁵⁰

African interpretations are existential and pragmatic in nature, and contextual in approach. For about 300 years, biblical scholarship has not been able to address the needs of the global community, because the methods employed were in the service of Western ideology and supported the aspirations of the powerful at the expense of the poor and weak. A cross-cultural hermeneutic is integrative, holistic, and culturally sensitive. This hermeneutic does not separate objectivity from subjectivity, the spiritual from the material, or history from eschatology, but holds them in symbiotic tension and makes them function

⁴⁸ Rhoads, 4.

⁴⁹ Ukpong, "Inculturation Hermeneutics, 18.

⁵⁰ Justin Ukpong, "Reading the Bible with African Eyes," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995): 3–14.

in a dialectical relationship.⁵¹ It involves engagement in the practical issues of society, with the social, cultural, political, economic, and religious realities of the interpretive community as parameters.

The goal of this hermeneutic is to draw parallels between the world of Paul's ancient audience and the world of the contemporary Shona readers. Hence, the veneration of ancestors in the Greco-Roman world of the Augustan Age becomes a paradigm for a cross-cultural interpretation. My goal as a Shona Christian is to read Paul's epistles, if not the entire Bible, in a way that respects cultural difference.

A cross-cultural hermeneutic respects "otherness" beyond assimilation and accommodation.⁵² This approach sees a text's meaning as embedded in its ancient cultural context. A text is more meaningful when interpreted in full consciousness of its engagement with the existential cultural context of its readers. This hermeneutic of cultural difference finds validation in the biblical values of love, peace, and justice, as well as respect for others, community building, and inclusiveness.⁵³

Because the Bible is not a modern Western document but an ancient Mediterranean one, a cross-cultural reading of the Bible is not a matter of choice but a necessity.⁵⁴ Although I am attempting to interpret a particular construction of a figure from religious traditions in Paul's final epistle, nevertheless I recognize that symbols and social functions operate across cultures. These symbols and cultures can work alongside one another, if they establish boundaries of respect for each other, for the purpose of elevating the saving grace of Jesus Christ across cultures.

This cross-cultural, anthropological paradigm differs from the nineteenth century history of religions approach, which sought primarily to trace the background of Paul's thought, or influences upon Paul's

⁵¹ Justin Ukpong, "New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities," *Catholic Institute of West Africa, Nigeria* 35 (2001): 151.

⁵² Fred R. Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter* (Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001), 40–1.

⁵³ Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, 136–8.

⁵⁴ See Richard L. Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 1–15. Rohrbaugh argues that "since the Bible is a Mediterranean document written for Mediterranean readers, it presumes the cultural resources and worldview available to a reader socialized in the Mediterranean world. This means that for all non-Mediterraneans, including all Americans, reading the Bible is always an exercise in cross-cultural communication. It is only a question of doing it poorly or doing it well." 16.

formulation. In contrast, I am seeking to grasp the underlying logic of both the Hellenistic-Jewish world and the Greco-Roman culture as it pertains to the function of ancestors. I am seeking to reconstruct how Paul operated subversively within various ideologies. In his cross-cultural approach to the gospel, Paul, a Hellenistic Jew, sought to be 'all things to all people,' to win them to the gospel (1 Cor. 9:23). The method I use acknowledges that Paul found ethnic/cultural differences important, and he used this diversity to shape the gospel to speak to Mediterranean cultures of the Augustan Age.

The cross-cultural Paul is the Jew who lived like a Gentile⁵⁵ and embraced other social identities as a missionary strategy and as a matter of principle; it was his way of being true to God's equal love for all, "since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (Rom. 3:30).⁵⁶ Paul's gospel is the warrant for his cross-cultural mission and our warrant for reading Paul cross-culturally.

Fittingly, the Paul who crossed cultural boundaries has become the Paul interpreted from many cultural perspectives. But especially, this Paul has been interpreted from the Western perspective. There may be a lesson here, which I wish to uncover by turning the reader's attention to where the text of Romans came from, and how its ancient audience understood it. I am proposing a way of thinking which puts the ancient symbolic worldview before the modern reader. In our multicultural world, we have much to learn from Paul about living the gospel in the midst of cultural diversity.⁵⁷

Culture is all about how different groups in their unique settings continue to draw lines through space and time. Schools of cultural anthropology have defined culture as follows:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts: the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas, especially, their attached values; culture sys-

⁵⁵ Charles H. Cosgrove, Herold Weiss, and Khiok-khng Yeo, eds., *Cross-Cultural Paul: Journeys to Others, Journeys to Ourselves* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

tems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditions upon further action.⁵⁸

On the other hand, ideology is a polemical concept that regards ideas as autonomous and efficacious, thereby failing to grasp the characteristics of social-historical life.⁵⁹ Ideology expresses the interest of the dominant class. In any historical period, the ideas and values composing an ideology articulate the concerns of the dominant social groups as they struggle to secure and maintain domination. In Romans 3:27–4:25, Paul creatively subverted the ideology supporting the interests of the dominant class, thereby making Christianity a scandalous religion within the dominant Greco-Roman and Hellenistic-Jewish cultures.

From an African point of view, culture is a system embracing people, things, and events that are socially symbolized, made meaningful in such a way that all members of a given group share, appreciate, and live out of that meaning. Cultures of the world, especially the Shona culture, are remarkably open to the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, the way the gospel was presented to Zimbabweans was colonial in nature. Dickson Mungazi elaborates the mindset of the colonizers of Zimbabwe from 1890 to the period of independence. He quotes Cecil John Rhodes, who stated the following in a parliamentary debate in Cape Town in 1896:

I say that the natives are like children. They are just emerging from barbarism. They have a human mind, but they are like children, and we ought to do something to develop that mind. We have to treat the natives where they are, in a state of barbarism... We will continue to treat them as a subject race as long they continue to be in a state of barbarism.⁶⁰

Rhodes's proclamation empowered the Euro-American missionaries in Zimbabwe to work toward destroying African culture and all that defined the native people.

With this background in mind, the following questions will be addressed: (1) How can the Christian faith be translated into new languages and new cultural forms? (2) How can the contemporary Shona

⁵⁸ A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, eds., *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum, 1952), 180–1.

⁵⁹ John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 38.

⁶⁰ Dickson Mungazi, *The Mind of Black Africa* (London: Preager, 1997), 27–9.

mindset be decolonized in order to accept the gospel within the culture of the indigenous people? and (3) How much of the Christian faith is culturally conditioned by the indigenous peoples, and how much is transcultural? This hermeneutic seeks to detextualize the study of Paul by examining the cultural role of figures. Thus, Aeneas and Abraham as ancestor figures provide the lenses through which Zimbabweans can appropriate the Pauline gospel.

Paul used mutual interchange and dialogue with the Mediterranean culture to speak to it in a transformative way. He sensitively engaged the ancient culture and interpreted Abraham from a Mediterranean viewpoint. Cross-cultural hermeneutics values cultural diversity. Other biblical interpretation methods of the past 350 years have sometimes ignored or manipulated indigenous voices in favor of Western portraits of Paul. A cross-cultural hermeneutic seeks to contest the hegemony of colonial Christianity, and of white, male, Euro-American scholarship.

The appropriateness of a cross-cultural hermeneutic is that it can construct an indigenous theology that speaks beyond the context of the dominant group. The Greco-Roman religions and Hellenistic-Jewish religion were mutually transformative. Paul's theology was expressed in the context of diversity and love; his appropriation of Abraham as ancestor of all people suggests to the global community that all traditions can participate in the interpretative process, in which the uniqueness of the other is differentiated and esteemed, while the commonalities of all are identified, shared, and celebrated. Paul's goal in Romans was to affirm different traditions and facilitate their dialogue for the sole purpose of glorifying God.

My goal as an African from postcolonial Zimbabwe is to see how New Testament texts can function to overcome oppression and exploitation, and to see how the gospel can be interpreted as it crosses the cultural boundaries of Africa.

The Constituents of Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics

The hermeneutic I have chosen to sustain this study acknowledges that the Greco-Roman world of Paul's time had its own distinctive "worldview—that is, a way of looking at reality."⁶¹ This worldview, especially

⁶¹ Kearney, *Worldview*, 41.

during the Augustan Age, must be brought into modern perspective if readers are to correctly understand Paul's interpretation of Abraham in Romans 4. Thus, this hermeneutic is cross-cultural, as it seeks to bridge the gap between the past and the present. The questions to be addressed in this section are: (1) How does the context of the ancient world shape the interpretations of the modern world? (2) What are the elements of cross-cultural hermeneutics? (3) What is the significance of cross-cultural hermeneutics for an African Christian in Zimbabwe? (4) How does Paul's ancestral language fit into cross-cultural hermeneutics? and (5) How do Aeneas and Abraham function in cross-cultural hermeneutics?

What follows is a discussion of the elements of this methodology, whose aim is to interpret and appropriate⁶² the biblical message within the Shona context. These elements are: (1) local people as subjects of interpretation, (2) the Shona worldview as the conceptual frame of reference in interpretation, (3) the contextual nature of reading, (4) cultural symbols as tools in interpretation, (5) holistic approach to culture, and (6) seeing the meaning of a text as a function of the interaction between the text's original context and its present context.

The Shona people of Zimbabwe—who are identified in kinship terms and defined by their common totems; their religio-cultural, sociohistorical situations; their political situations; and their economic life—constitute the subject of my interpretation of the Bible. Here, cultural elements become hermeneutical tools. In the case of the Shona, these resources include sacred sites such as graves, rivers, mountains, caves, and trees; Shona socioreligious and cultural institutions, thought systems, and practices; African oral narrative genre; African art and symbols; dance; and music.

A cross-cultural hermeneutic uses the people's conceptual frame of reference, its culture, as it reflects their concerns and values, as a resource for interpretation. This ensures the integrity of the cultural and ideological identity of the readers.⁶³ When these elements are removed, reading the text becomes subjective. Hence, cross-cultural hermeneutics is characterized by the interdependence of these three elements: local people's conceptual frame of reference, indigenous

⁶² 'Interpret' in this book refers to the meaning we give to a text in its original context. 'Appropriate' means to apply an interpretation in a modern cultural context.

⁶³ Ukpong, "Inculturation Hermeneutics," 20.

people as subjects of interpretation, and the people's cultural context. This methodology does not borrow Euro-American methods; rather, the worldview of the local people shapes the meaning of the text. This helps to overcome the dominance of the elite in biblical interpretation and values the perspective ordinary people bring to reading the Bible.

The crucial element of cross-cultural hermeneutics is that the Shona people become the subject of interpretation. The text's meaning is not appropriated by a foreign culture and applied to the Shona context; rather, a Shona context is used in appropriating the text. This hermeneutic asserts that every reading is contextual, and any reading that claims a universal nature should be viewed with suspicion. Readings lay no claim to universal meaning; they are contextual.

The Shona people strongly believe that the past continues to influence the present and the future. This linear and cyclical time is celebrated in ritual ceremonies that bring solidarity between the world of the living and the world of the dead, the latter being the realm where the remembered has gone in the role of most recent messenger. The past is represented by the departed, the present by the participants in ceremonies, and the future by the goal of salvation. A cross-cultural hermeneutic involves interpreting a text in terms of the present, but not isolated from the past.⁶⁴ This methodology affirms that, though the Bible spoke to a specific historical context in the past, "the biblical message transcends the particularity of its context and becomes part of our world today and can therefore speak to the present."⁶⁵ Cross-cultural hermeneutics thus makes it possible to address existential and practical questions of the Shona.

Culture encompasses a community's total way of life, and each community deserves its dignity. Activities such as politics, social events, religion, economics, art, agriculture, child rearing, and many others all belong to the realm of culture. Justin Ukpong reminds us that culture is an indispensable medium for interpreting the world, for self-expression, and for self-understanding.⁶⁶ Cross-cultural hermeneutics recognizes that indigenous people make important contributions to the production of meaning and invites both the professional scholar

⁶⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 29.

and the uneducated peasant to participate in the process of biblical interpretation.

An important aspect of Shona life and thought is that it focuses more on the concrete than the theoretical. Thus, from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective, the Bible is not merely a moral treatise, but is to be incarnated in peoples' lives. The focus for the Shona people is not on an abstract God but on God who relates to people in their historical context. Academic methods used over the last 350 years cannot be applied to the daily dynamics of an existential life and have thus proven inadequate.

The Shona people demonstrate their faith in very practical ways. For the Shona people, religion is embedded in their culture. The Shona culture was obscured by colonization and by Euro-American missionaries. And colonization of the Shona began with colonization of their deity, *Mwari*, or God.⁶⁷ (Chapter three contains a fuller discussion of the Shona faith.)

Euro-American dominated readings of the Bible in Africa have advanced the propaganda of the powerful at the expense of the poor and powerless. A cross-cultural hermeneutic can be used to bring the world of Paul's audience into the contemporary world. An analysis of these two worldviews illuminates the realm through which Paul speaks of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25.

The Shona people of Zimbabwe, much like the Greco-Roman people of the Augustan Age, believe that one's ancestral heritage influences who one is and who one becomes. In constructing Abraham as a spiritual ancestor, Paul interacts with a trend in early Roman imperialism, which sought a basis for reconciling Greeks and Romans through Aeneas as ancestor. Yet, by asserting that Abraham the Jew, rather than Aeneas the Roman, is the ancestor of the people of faith, Paul can subvert Roman imperial power. Through cross-cultural hermeneutics, Shona Christians have a new portal to spirituality that was obscured by their colonial experience, and the interpretation of texts becomes meaningful in tribal cultures.

Ancestors play a crucial role in this cross-cultural hermeneutic. In the Shona religion, ancestors function as mediators between God and humanity. So the Shona people always pray through the ancestors.

⁶⁷ M. L. Daneel, *The God of the Matopo Hills: An Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia* (Mouton: The Hague, Paris, 1970), 23.

They approach God in this way for various reasons. The first involves a sense of respect the Shona have for God's name. The second is related to respect and honor, and the Shona people's understanding of death. These two reasons clarify what has been called 'African ancestor worship.' Cross-cultural hermeneutics seeks to assert that the Shona people of Zimbabwe and all Africans south of the Sahara do not worship their ancestors. Rather, ancestor veneration is part of the Shona worldview, as it was for ancient Greeks and Romans.

Ancestors function in the Shona worldview as part of the living community. A death does not end one's relationship with the living; dead ancestors are considered to be "the living dead" or "living timeless."⁶⁸ They are still functioning in another form—the spiritual form—and can mediate for their families since they are closer to God. One would pray following the hierarchy, beginning with one's deceased father, then grandfather, and so forth, to the name of the last person remembered. Commenting on the Shona worldview, Bishop Hatendi notes:

A person is inextricably and indissolubly one with the past, present and future. The time concept is the observance of the collective personality. The family-group includes the dead who are revered because they are believed to be nearer the source of life, but they are never deified. They play the role of the "go-between" as in Shona marriage and royal protocol. It is in this sense that the Shona pray to the dead.⁶⁹

Euro-American missionaries destroyed this sense of the past, present, and future because they thought the African way of remembering ancestors was paganistic, heathenistic, and animistic. In other words, Christian missionaries rejected the religio-cultural worldview of the Shona, which gave the Shona people a sense of identity and belonging. A cross-cultural hermeneutic affirms the tradition of former generations, helping individuals learn who they are in relation to ancestors.⁷⁰ This hermeneutic reveals that the worldview of the Shona people is close to the worldview of Paul's Greco-Roman audience as regards the role of ancestors.

⁶⁸ Mbiti, 25.

⁶⁹ R. P. Hatendi, "Shona Marriage and the Christian Churches," in J. A. Dachs ed., *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, vol. 1 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1973), 146.

⁷⁰ Kearney, in *Worldview*, put it well: "cultures and societies exist in history, through time, and are constantly self-creating by responding to historically given conditions. Idea systems and culture in general, while having a certain autonomy, are primarily responses—continuities—of that which has gone before," 5.

This leads us to a deeper analysis of culture and religion, and their relationship. Peter Berger argues that humans are congenitally compelled to impose order upon reality.⁷¹ Culture exists only as people are conscious of it.⁷² Thus, culture and meaning are inseparable because it is through externalization that society is a human product. When human beings internalize culture, they become products of a society. Religion, on the other hand, is perceived as:

a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.⁷³

In this definition, religion becomes the existential relationship between God and humans. The meaning of life, the quest for faith and wholeness, and the pursuit of truth are ultimate concerns in the redemptive manifestations of God who is “our existential ultimate concern and the ontological ultimate reality.”⁷⁴ This is the level in which we find Paul operating in Romans 4, and especially in his construction of Abraham as a spiritual ancestor of all who share his faith.

Implementing cross-cultural hermeneutics is a three-fold process. First, it involves techniques to help the reader understand a work in its original context.⁷⁵ Second, it is the science of discerning how a thought or event in one cultural context may be understood in another.⁷⁶ For purposes of this study, it is crucial to establish that Aeneas and Abraham were elevated in meaning to religious symbols. Cross-cultural hermeneutics illuminates how Paul constructed Abraham as a spiritual ancestor. The third element of cross-cultural hermeneutics is bridging the gap between ancient biblical meanings and contemporary categories of thought.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 22.

⁷² Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 78.

⁷³ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Press, 1966), 4.

⁷⁴ James Will, *Christology of Peace* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 1.

⁷⁵ J. A. Sanders, “Hermeneutics,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, supplementary volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 402–3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

I find the following interpretation of culture and religion by Geertz to be meaningful:

Religion is never merely metaphysics, religion is never merely ethics either. The source of its moral vitality is conceived to lie in the fidelity with which it expresses the fundamental nature of reality. The powerfully coercive “ought” is felt to grow out of a comprehensive factual “is,” and in such a way religion grounds the most specific requirements of human action in the most general contexts of human existence.⁷⁸

This understanding of religion brings ontology and morality into dialectical relationship. Moral ‘oughtness’ grows out of one’s sense of identity and existence as one faces changes caused by life challenges. Cross-culturally speaking, my view of religion and culture is influenced by the Shona dialectical understanding of metaphysics and morality, cosmology and anthropology.

The traditional Shona worldview is religio-cultural; their culture is intricately connected with their past, present, and future community.⁷⁹ This worldview is given meaning by *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is the essence of being morally human; the term encompasses relationships among human beings, both male and female, as well as humanity’s relationship with the cosmos.

In Shona tribal societies, people are expected to have full and undivided faith in, and loyalty toward, socially shared ancestors. The Shona embrace the life of the group rather than individualism. Related to the concept of *ubuntu* is the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’⁸⁰ and the need for harmony between the two. The concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’ will be dealt with in chapter two. For now, it suffices to establish that the Shona worldview is informed by the traditional communal religio-cultural values of Shona society. These values are grounded in relationship with God, ancestors, humans, and nature through the community of the living and the dead. In traditional Shona society, it is through relating to God, others, and nature that one gets a sense of the spiritual self. This is also evident in the propaganda of Augustus, where we find him venerating Aeneas as a symbol of meaning for the Greeks and Romans.

⁷⁸ Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 126.

⁷⁹ ‘Religio-cultural’ in this book means the close connection that exists between the religion and culture of the contemporary traditional Shona people in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

⁸⁰ Kearney, *Worldview*, 72–3.

Cross-cultural hermeneutics seeks to bring the values of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans face to face with the values of the Western world. This hermeneutic contends that Jesus Christ is normative and includes others by his sacrificial death for all humanity. The central contribution of this hermeneutic is its acknowledgement that God's relationship with people is universal, while God's manifestation to people is contextual; God's salvific work is universal in the cosmic Christ but particular in the contextual Christ. Paul implies as much in his interpretation of Abraham as a spiritual ancestor of all who have faith.⁸¹ The tradition of the cross challenges every ethnocentric biblical reading because the cross critiques every culture and yet includes all cultures (Gal. 3:28 and Rom. 6:3–11).

Cross-culturally, a criterion of salvation is how one relates to God in response to the manifestation of God in a particular context. God's manifestation to all cultures "has been a constitutive dimension of Christianity from the beginning—from the event at Pentecost when pilgrims to Jerusalem from many cultures heard the apostles praising God *in their own tongues*."⁸² That relationship to God's manifestation is a response to the divine, which I call faith. These two themes—salvation and faith—will be developed in chapters two and three.

We need to establish the motivation behind Paul's radical interpretation of Abraham, and this is found in the Christ event. Culturally speaking, Jesus was crucified by Rome, a colonial power, operating through colonially appointed religious officials. The Christ event critiques cultural inclinations to distrust God and to trust colonial ideologies. Cross-culturally, the human dilemma is the impulse to find security in culture through promoting an ideology.

As was true during the Augustan Age, human beings today tend to trust in political, religious, and economic ideologies rather than in God. The death of Christ revealed that God's righteousness is available to all according to faith rather than conformity to an ideology. Paul interprets Abraham as spiritual father of all with faith in God. Schleirmacher writes, "Christian faith lies neither in doctrinal subscription nor in ethical perfection but in the consciousness of being

⁸¹ See Acts 10:34–35, where Luke, quoting Peter, writes: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (NRSV).

⁸² Rhoads, 224.

absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God.”⁸³

In Romans, Paul proclaims that God shows no partiality. A cross-cultural reading of the Christ event shows that the risen Christ and the reign of God indicate the eschatological reality of that truth, and its open-endedness emerging in the twenty-first century.⁸⁴ God’s truth and reign are eschatological and never perceived in the present moment. Cultures are called to continue searching for truth. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul cautions ideological *pneumatikoi*/ spiritualists to be careful about claiming full knowledge of what was to come. Paul writes, “Now we see in a mirror dimly; but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood” (1 Cor. 13:12). It is possible that in Romans Paul makes a cultural confession by realizing that God can only be appropriated through faith, and interprets Abraham to respond to a culture that valued ancestor veneration.

One area relevant for cross-cultural hermeneutics is culture and language. Gadamar has said about the relationship between language and culture or tradition: “language is not only an object in our hands, it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world.”⁸⁵ Thus, the ancestor language in Romans 4 is especially meaningful to people in cultures where ancestor veneration is embraced.

Hermeneutics involves understanding a text through cultural similarities and differences, and through the reader’s cultural context. These similarities and differences speak to the need for all to continue communicating through their cultural language, so that the common life-experience of all will be enriched. Schleirmacher contends:

understanding always involves two moments: to understand what is said in the context of the language with its possibilities and to understand it as a fact in thinking of the speaker, these two hermeneutical tasks are completely equal, and it would be incorrect to label grammatical

⁸³ F. D. E. Schleirmacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 12.

⁸⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 84–5.

⁸⁵ Hans-George Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 29.

interpretation the lower and psychological interpretation as the higher task.⁸⁶

Cross-cultural hermeneutics encourages interpreters to talk about other cultures and to listen and transpose themselves out of the familiar. The fundamental goal is to understand that ancient Mediterranean cultures lived under pervasive energy that held societies together. This power, "causality,"⁸⁷ is similar to what the Shona people refer to as the world of ancestors. Kinship ties—relationships between the "self" and the "other"⁸⁸—are held intact by this power. Power is inherent to creation; it pervades the world and is responsible for virtually everything that happens.⁸⁹ This power is concentrated in certain special objects, places, or persons, perhaps only at certain times or under special conditions.⁹⁰ In the world of the Shona, this power is reserved for ancestors and is found in special places like trees, caves, mountains, and rivers. All Shona people desire access to this power, to use in building identity. In Pauline terms, this power is analogous to the Holy Spirit as the force behind a Christian group.

Cross-cultural hermeneutics challenges readers to re-live (*nacherleben*) others' experiences so they can empathize and transpose themselves through the experiences of others.⁹¹ In the Shona worldview, one's sense of self is formed mainly through one's relationship with others. Humanity is a community of interpretation, and being conscious of cultural pluralism, in fact, means implicitly transcending it.

Through cultural hermeneutics, we are called to understand cultural symbols in art and images. The Shona venerate ancestors and interpret them in songs, art, and story. History is orally passed from one

⁸⁶ F. D. E. Schleirmacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, trans. J. Duke and J. Forstman (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 98–9.

⁸⁷ Kearney, *Worldview*, 148–51. Causality is defined as follows: "The first thing which is implied in the notion of the causal relationship is the idea of efficacy, of productive power, of active force. By cause we ordinarily mean something capable of producing a certain change. The cause is the force before it has shown the power which is in it; the effect is this same power, only actualized," 85. The members of a society will believe in the efficacy of its communal rituals, the practice of which is part of the glue that holds society together in terms of locating social relationships.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Dilthey Wilhelm, vol. 7, partly translated in "The Development of Hermeneutics," in *Selected Writings*, ed. H. P. Rickman, and part selections in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. K. Mueller-Vollmer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 177, 218.

generation to the next. Thus, cross-cultural hermeneutics entails both articulation of and immediate participation in the life-world given to us by our founders. To understand is to experience and to interpret. Gadamer puts it well when he states:

language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized. All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language. Thus, the hermeneutical phenomenon proves to be a special case of the general relationship between thinking and speaking, the mysterious intimacy of which is bound up with the way in which speech is contained, in a hidden way, in thinking.⁹²

The biblical text communicates its message without denying its cultural tradition, but interpreters cannot objectify the tradition since the text itself is in a closed horizon. However, cross-cultural hermeneutics emphasizes that the horizon of the past continues to be formed and transformed within the cultural context of a given group. Interpreters choose to engage in a dialogical process to bridge the gap between the past and present. Thus, hermeneutics must be cross-cultural and dialogical.

When scholars participate in cross-cultural dialogue, they transcend traditions to which we have been held captive for 350 years and encounter the confluence of traditions. The effect of these confluences is the affirmation of diversity and appreciation of each tradition. In fact, the goal of cross-cultural hermeneutics “is not agreement or disagreement but transformations that may emerge from a free and critical sharing of diverse perspectives on the Bible.”⁹³

The socio-critical approach of Habermas might be valuable to cross-cultural hermeneutics. Habermas denies Gadamer’s notions of “the ontological priority of linguistic tradition,” the claim of universality, and the lack of social critique. Gadamer uses insights he borrowed from Marx and Freud, and questions the legitimacy of authority or tradition in the distorted communication process. In fact, his hermeneutical approach seeks to eliminate existing distorted communication. Thiselton captures the practical implications of Habermas:

On the one hand, language is a matter of action by social agents; hence the approach which sees everything in terms of system is one sided and

⁹² Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 245.

⁹³ Rhoads, 225.

incomplete. System ignores the dimension of human action and contingent hermeneutic. On the other hand, we cannot fully understand or critically evaluate the inter-personal language game as life-world without reference to the system which transcends it.⁹⁴

This implies that cross-cultural hermeneutics has a socio-critical component, and this allows interpreters to approach a text with certain trust and doubt. This is crucial because faith and doubt are two major components of human reality.

All biblical texts are embodied in, and conditioned by, culture. Culturally speaking, the text of Romans 4 is contextually conditioned and ought to be indigenously interpreted. In this approach, word study becomes central because meaning is embedded in words. Stephen Neil argued that “when religion is separated from culture, it becomes anemic—religion cannot feed on itself, it has to feed on life.”⁹⁵ In other words, when culture is separated from religion, culture becomes demonic.⁹⁶ In the words of Berger, “culture without a religion is risky because it is without the benefit of religious interpretations.”⁹⁷ Simply put, cross-cultural hermeneutics seeks communication, identification, differentiation, and transformation through a dialogical, trans-spatio-temporal process.

The Shona Worldview as a Hermeneutical Perspective

The cross-cultural hermeneutics I have proposed presumes that no reader approaches a text without baggage. As a Shona reader, I want to be conscious of the cultural baggage I bring. That baggage is summarized in two cultural words: ‘ancestor veneration.’ This book does not deal with the exegesis of Romans; rather, I am interested in entering into a cultural dialogue with Paul’s interpretation of Abraham as a spiritual ancestor of all who have faith in God.

My engagement with the text of Romans manifests itself in three ways. First, I am concerned with the contextual understanding of the text and the cultural construction of the audience of Romans 3:27–4:1–25

⁹⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 388.

⁹⁵ Neil Stephen, “Religion and Culture: A Historical Introduction,” in *Gospel and Culture: the Papers of a Consultation on the Gospel and Culture*, ed. John Stott and Robert T. Coote (Pasedina: William Carey Library, 1979), 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 108.

in the context of the appropriation of Aeneas as an ancestor of Greeks and Romans. In this regard, the works of Virgil and Dionysius will aid my cross-cultural approach.⁹⁸ As a cross-cultural reader, I recognize the need to delineate the complexity of cultural context so that hermeneutical interpretations can be conveyed as contexts change.

Second, my interest in cross-cultural hermeneutics is motivated by my Shona belief in ancestral veneration and my understanding of the function of ancestors as social constructs. In Shona culture, there is a saying, *Munhu vanhu*, which means “a person is because of other people.” This saying illuminates the way Shona people define the concept of self, not by wealth or political power; but as a function of one’s community of “embeddedness.”⁹⁹ The following Shona sayings support the argument that the worldview and self understanding of Africans is community based: (1) I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am, (2) One tree does not make a forest, and (3) A charcoal or coal gets its burning from being in the fire of others. In other words, humans get their vitality, security, and identity from being in relationship with others. This worldview was lost when colonization and Christianity came to Zimbabwe in 1890. Colonialism and Christianity worked together to dominate the indigenous culture.¹⁰⁰ A defining belief of the Shona people of Zimbabwe is ancestral veneration; the Shona see their ancestors as divine beings who communicate the message of God to the living.

Third, my interest in Aeneas and Abraham is cross-cultural in that both men, under divine sanction, are founding figures of a powerful people: Aeneas of the Romans, and Abraham of the Israelites or Jews.

⁹⁸ See Arnaldo Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987). Momigliano states: “But we have the full text of the two writers of the Augustan Age who shaped the story of their time, Dionysius and Virgil, and we can see with our own eyes that they wanted the story to mean reconciliation and friendship between Greeks and Trojans,” 281.

⁹⁹ Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). The phrase ‘community of embeddedness’ is appropriated in this book in a similar sense as Kegan uses it in referring to a “culture of embeddedness.” He defines this as a “psychosocial environment or the holding environment.” He argues that it is a particular form of the world context in which, or out of which, a person grows and evolves psychologically and socially. I would add that it is a political, social, religious and economic environment out of which people are born and raised.

¹⁰⁰ Dora R. Mbuwayesango, “How Local Divine Powers were Suppressed: A Case of *Mwari* of the Shona,” in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 259.

It will be crucial in this book to show how Aeneas and Abraham were interpreted, the latter by Paul, and the former by Virgil and Dionysius. Central to both figures is the word *fides*, which implies that wholeness and harmony will be reached through a lifestyle of dependence upon, and reciprocity with, the past.¹⁰¹

My goal is to read Paul's epistle with consideration for other cultures. I do not read scripture in a vacuum, but from a contextual perspective—through the Shona lens. The strategic position of ancestors in both the Mediterranean and Shona worlds makes ancestor veneration vital to any discussion of Abraham as a spiritual figure to all who imitate his faith.

Thus, Paul's presentation of Abraham in Romans 4 deserves a cross-cultural reading. When Paul interpreted Abraham as an ancestor, he was responding to a culture whose worldview was dominated by a strong belief in Aeneas as a founding ancestor of the Greeks and Romans. Paul used this paradigm to make Abraham the spiritual ancestor of all God's people. Paul's presentation of Abraham in the Epistle to the Romans represents a creative development within the tradition of Abraham in Jewish writings such as Jubilees; Tobit; Ben Sirach; 1, 2, and 4 Maccabees; Judith; Josephus; and Philo. Hellenistic Jews of Paul's time, especially Philo and Josephus, elevated Abraham as the spiritual father of Judaism.

This study asserts that Paul puts forth a new definition of God for a universal humanity, thus making a cross-cultural reading of Romans possible.¹⁰² Paul also offers a new definition of God's people as descended from Abraham, no longer on the basis of ethnicity or righteous deeds, but on the basis of Abraham's active faith in the one true God.¹⁰³ Paul radically reshapes what it means to be a descendant

¹⁰¹ Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 102–3.

¹⁰² See Dean Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 118–52. Christians are finally realizing that for the gospel to be meaningful it must come to people in categories that make sense within their particular culture. Contextualization has to do with how the gospel comes to life in each cultural, social, political, religious and historical setting. Paul's letters are models of doing context-oriented theology for the diverse churches and situations he addressed.

¹⁰³ See Wolfgang Stegemann, "The Emergence of God's New People: The Beginnings of Christianity Reconsidered," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi: Come e nato il Cristianesimo?*, 21/2 (Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori delle Religioni, 2004) who argues that "unlike the many other ancient peoples, the Christianoi as God's people share no common genealogical descent from a common ancestor. Instead, they were

of Abraham. As Žizek puts it, Paul elevated Christianity from a Jewish sect into a multi-ethnic religion.¹⁰⁴ Hellenistic Jews before Paul and even during Paul's time presented Abraham as the spiritual ancestor of Judaism as a universal religion. However, for Gentiles to appropriate Abraham as a forefather, they had to embrace the law and become Jews. Drawing upon the Greco-Roman appropriation of Aeneas as a figure of reconciliation between cultures, Paul makes Abraham the spiritual ancestor of all those whose lives are characterized by *pistis/fides* regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

This study will show that the paradigm for Paul's attempt to use "Abraham our forefather"¹⁰⁵ to reconcile Jews and Gentiles is found in Greek and Roman writers of the first-century B.C.E. who used Aeneas to reconcile Greeks and Romans.¹⁰⁶ The *Aeneid* qualifies as a paradigm for the cross-cultural reading of Romans 4:1–25 because the epic exposes the typological possibilities in the figure of Aeneas in comparison with the figure of Abraham. I contend that this background is essential in the exegesis of Paul. This comparison shows how ancestors or founders function as uniting symbols. Aeneas has striking similarities with Abraham; these similarities cannot be ignored if New Testament scholars wish to recover the message and purpose of Paul.¹⁰⁷ The paradigm will be helpful in our attempt to establish a link between the ancient world of Paul's mission and the worldview of the African Christians in Zimbabwe, thus making it possible for them to appropriate Abraham as a spiritual ancestor on the basis of faith. The

connected through fictive kinship, which means that they belonged to the household of God (*familia dei*) and ultimately traced their birth to and from God (baptism as symbolic (re-) birth)," 78.

¹⁰⁴ Slavoj Žizek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 10.

¹⁰⁵ Rom 4:1–25.

¹⁰⁶ This reconciliation paradigm has been given poignancy by Arnaldo Momigliano in *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*. On page 264 he states that "Virgil managed to turn the image of the Trojan Aeneas into a symbol of friendship between Greeks and Romans. Aeneas remained specifically the symbol of reconciliation between Greeks and Romans, and never became a generic symbol of friendship between the various peoples of the Roman Empire." While Momigliano's point is valid, we should not forget that various Roman families claimed Aeneas long before Virgil. But Virgil changed the meaning of this claim. See T. P. Wiseman, *The Myths of Rome*, 16–8.

¹⁰⁷ This particular portrayal of Aeneas has been given meaning by Marianne Palmer Bonz in *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 31–56. See also Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 6–51.

ancestors have to be recognized in the African context not as rivals of Jesus Christ, but rather as part of the community governed by Jesus Christ, placing the ancestors within the Communion of Saints¹⁰⁸ governed by Jesus Christ.

Informed by the cross-cultural world of Paul, this book will establish the need to be sensitive to other cultures. I will present reasons why recognizing Abraham as an ancestor contributes to the enculturation of Christianity in postcolonial Zimbabwe. This study presents the cosmology of the Shona people as not limited by time. For Africans, the physical and spiritual worlds are inseparable. The ancestors are communicating in the language of both worlds, and acting on behalf of both worlds. In the language of Romans 4, Abraham is present in the visible and invisible worlds where he continues to influence the faithful ones.¹⁰⁹

My motivation for undertaking this project is cultural, because religion is embedded in people's culture. The use of the ancestral concept is relevant in an attempt to situate Paul's gospel within the world of the Shona people. Rather than beginning with Jesus, I will start with Abraham, the ancestor of all whose religions use him as a model figure. Using Aeneas as a paradigm makes it possible to read Abraham cross-culturally.

¹⁰⁸ *The Apostle's Creed*. See also John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), 24–5.

¹⁰⁹ See the narrative in Luke 16:19–31, where the above description seems apt.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANCESTOR IN GRECO-ROMAN CULTURE: THE CASE OF AENEAS

Pauline commentators often overlook two important cultural points when reading Romans. First, Roman house churches were located in the capital from which the imperial princes ruled a far-flung empire.¹ Members of these house churches probably knew about Aeneas, and the power attached to the Aeneas myth as a story of self-definition, reconciliation, and collaboration. Not only that, but the story had universal implications, so much so that the myth was central to Roman ideology and served the propaganda of Augustus well. I intend to show that ethnicity was prevalent in these house churches and people were eager to define themselves in genealogical terms. Second, the Julian-Claudian family claimed descent from Aeneas, thus making Aeneas the ancestor of the whole empire. However, few Pauline commentators consider how first-century residents of Rome might have perceived the apostle's message of Abraham as an ancestor of faith in its imperial context. New Testament scholars must seriously consider the centrality of ancestors in the Age of Augustus. In sum, this loss of cross-cultural perspective keeps students of Romans from asking incisive questions of the text regarding the first-century context of autochthony, with the result being that Paul's dynamic gospel is reduced to timeless dogmatics.

To more fully understand the cultural *milieu* of Romans, we will examine two, writers of the Augustan Age, namely Dionysius and Virgil, propagators of the Aeneas legend. Aeneas, a migrant hero, was claimed as an ancestor by a host of tribes. Both Greeks and Romans had known migrations throughout their history² and, as such, Aeneas

¹ See a general discussion on elements of imperial policy by L. V. Rutgers in "Roman Policy Towards the Jews: Expulsion from the City of Rome during the First Century C.E.," 93–116, and "Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity During the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, I Clement," in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 196–244.

² Momigliano, *On Pagans*, 265.

met the spirit of the time. By the Age of Augustus, Rome was a cosmopolitan city with different “peoples and cultures, brought forcibly by slavery, or attracted by need and ambition to this exceptional center of wealth and power.”³ It was essential for Augustus to base his imperial rule on a well-defined ancestor who would appeal to many cultures. Thus, Aeneas becomes an autochthonous hero for both Greeks and Romans. Augustus was determined to claim the past, and he did this by claiming Aeneas as the ancestor of the Julian family. In other words, Roman imperialism should not be separated from the search for autochthony.

For the purpose of forging a powerful identity, Augustus extended citizenship to foreigners, thus including them as descendants of Aeneas. This first happened when the “Italian peninsula”⁴ was allowed to come under Roman citizenship. Both Greeks and Romans had pride in autochthony, and each culture had high regard for their origins. That being said, the story of Aeneas is relevant in our attempt to investigate the nature of the reconciliation between Greeks and Romans.

While this book does not deal primarily with Homeric figures, we need to mention that Homeric heroes had equal honor and respect with Aeneas. The Virgilian Aeneas, whose travels parallel those of Odysseus, embodies certain significant traits of Homer’s Odysseus.⁵ As an African student whose life was shaped by a tradition of ancestors, I cannot simply elevate one figure at the expense of others. Ancestors follow a hierarchical tradition, but some are more powerful than others. In fact, of the two heroes, we are told that Odysseus was “the most god-fearing of all heroes in Homer,”⁶ a motif which Virgil later gave more meaning. In short, we must note that cultures prior to Augustus claimed Aeneas as an ancestor.

The Homeric poets before the Augustan Age point out that other heroes such as Achilles, Odysseus, Hercules, and Evander could have been accepted as ancestors of all the Roman people. But the Greeks had been their enemies: Pyrrhus was the Roman chief opponent in the third century B.C.E. Pyrrhus claimed descent from Achilles, and in the Trojan War the Romans felt themselves to be the natural allies of Troy.

³ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome: Classical World Series* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 43.

⁴ Momigliano, 268.

⁵ Galinsky, 38 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

⁶ *Ibid.*

Why would Romans claim an ancestor from their enemies? First, the Romans found a Trojan hero to be the ideal founder of Rome. Second, “the tale of Aeneas escaping from the city with his elderly father and household gods appealed to the Roman sense of piety and the cult of the hearth.”⁷ The idea of Aeneas as the founder of Rome, and of other Trojan heroes as founders of other Italian cities, became generally accepted. However, it was not until the time of Virgil—the greatest poet of classical Rome, who creatively constructed the central figure in his last and perhaps finest work (a national epic justifying the imperial regime)—that the capacity of the legend was fully realized.

The notion that Augustus sponsored the *Aeneid* should not be doubted because it was during his reign that Aeneas was elevated as an ancestor of the Julian family. Augustus’s victory at Actium in 31 B.C.E.—which signaled the end of civil war and the unification of the eastern and western hemispheres of the empire under one sovereign—provided the catalyst for Virgil’s *Aeneid*.⁸ The Greeks knew of the hero cult of wandering heroes, especially the cult of Odysseus.⁹ Our aim is not to discredit the *Aeneid*; rather, we want to appreciate the oral complexity in which this piece of art emerged. The *Aeneid* is a late elaboration of the complex of stories linking Troy and Italy that had been evolving ever since the first contact of Latins and Greeks eight centuries before.¹⁰ In other texts, we discover that “in the fifth century B.C.E. the historians Hellanikos and Damastes reported that Aeneas came into Italy from the land of the Molossians and joined with Odysseus in founding Rome.”¹¹ Archaeological evidence has proved that Romans did not view Odysseus with any hostility. The *gens* Mamilia, who claimed to have descended from Odysseus, issued coins in the second and first centuries B.C.E. bearing the hero’s likeness.¹² This is evidence of the power of written culture over oral cultures and consequently proves the impact and strength of Augustus (Octavius).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 67.

⁹ Wiseman in *The Myths of Rome*, asserts that “the Latins and Etruscans got to know these stories—and many others—by word of mouth, long before there were any written texts of Greek epic,” 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Galinsky, 38.

In addition to the Julii family, many other patrician houses claimed descent from Troy. In the lists we have the Aemilli, in two versions (Aimilia the daughter of Aeneas and Aemylos the son of Ascanius), the Cloelli, the Gegannii, and the Sergii. From the Trojans we have Clonius, Gyas, Sergestus, and the Sulpicii, whose descent from Jupiter via Lavinium must have been through Aeneas.¹³ Some of these families were popular in the fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E., and this is evidence of the widespread claim on Aeneas. Thus, the *Aeneid's* glamour should not lead us to imagine that Augustus's family was the first to claim descent from Troy. It is possible that before the *Aeneid* became the national epic of Italy, this honor most likely belonged to the *Odissia Latina* of Livius Andronicus.¹⁴ As will be shown, both Dionysius and Virgil present Aeneas as a migrant hero.

To widen the scope of our investigation, three questions will be dealt with in this chapter. First, how were the Greeks able to accept the story of Aeneas as an invitation to admire the Romans and to collaborate with them? Second, how did Virgil and Dionysius manage to turn Aeneas into a symbol of friendship between Greeks and Romans? Third, how does the story provide us with a paradigm for comprehending Paul's presentation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25? In both Virgil and Dionysius, Aeneas was the symbol of reconciliation between Greeks and Romans, and was never a generic symbol of reconciliation among various peoples of the Empire. In sum, Aeneas stands out as a cultural, political, and ideological construct. With this brief background, we will proceed with a discussion of the role Aeneas played in reconciling Greeks and Romans. I argue that Paul encountered this cultural paradigm in his cross-cultural missionary journeys and that the idea and force of ancestors was hard for him to overlook.

Appropriation of Aeneas as Ancestor

Impetus for the argument of this book is supplied by Stanley K. Stowers's analysis of Romans 4:1–25. In the words of Stowers, Abraham serves as a model not of the believer's saving faith but rather of how God brings to pass his promises by founding lineages that incorporate

¹³ Wiseman, 21.

¹⁴ F. Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion* (London: Methuen, 1938), 298–9.

whole peoples into the blessings made possible by the founding ancestors.¹⁵ However, Stowers's work does not offer the reader a clear picture of the role and function of ancestors. Stowers argues that the issue in Romans is not how God saves the generic human being, but rather how peoples establish a kinship with God and with one another.¹⁶ We hope to establish a link between early Christianity and traditional cultures whose identities were shaped by collective memories. This is where the works of Virgil and Dionysius provide a context and a paradigm for a cross-cultural reading of Romans.

The question concerns Paul's appropriation of the Aeneas ideology. The relevant answer is that Virgil, the Augustan poet, popularized the tradition of Aeneas as the cultural ancestor of Greek upper classes and Roman nobles.¹⁷ Virgil used Aeneas as a symbol to define Rome's moral and religious values and to inspire its people with a patriotic vision of a world whose eschatological fulfillment was embodied in the Augustan identification with the return of the Golden age.¹⁸ Drawing Aeneas into the historical horizon of Pauline exegesis will enable us to investigate the cross-cultural world in which Paul did his mission work. The attitudes of Paul's audiences must be taken into account in order to appreciate the importance of the Aeneas and Abraham comparison; that is, in making sense of Pauline exegesis, we must ask how his audience viewed the world, and how the hearers and readers of the Paul's writings were shaped essentially through the Hellenistic Diaspora synagogue. Commentaries and exegesis have not fully taken into account the complex intertextuality in which Paul did his mission work. One of the contributions of this book to postmodern

¹⁵ Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 227.

¹⁶ Ibid. See also T. P. Wiseman, who provides the reader with the best insight into disputes and claims for Aeneas as an ancestor of Greeks and Romans in his book *The Myths of Rome*, 11–21.

¹⁷ Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 6–51. According to Gruen, the canonical tradition on Rome's origins had taken firm root by the Age of Augustus. See also the *Aeneid* I.2.

¹⁸ Marianne Palmer-Bonz, *The Past As Legacy*, 38–9 (see chap. 1, n. 108). See also Michael Grant, *Roman Myths* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), who states the following on page 44: "The myth of Aeneas was closely associated with the family and person of Augustus, who claimed direct descent from him by right of adoption by Julius Caesar. In Augustus's funeral procession, the effigy of Aeneas was carried among the effigies of other ancestors. This was in accordance with tradition, for an important point of the Aeneas myth had been its jealousy conservation by those families which were able to claim Trojan descent."

Pauline studies is to assert the importance of cultures whose identities are defined by ancestral heritage.

Pauline exegetes must remember that Paul's earliest readers were inhabitants of the Roman Empire, and their knowledge of, and reactions to, the aggressive ideology of the Empire must be taken into account. The most important document to take as an intertext with Romans 4 may be the Augustan document known as the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*¹⁹ (hereafter referred to as the *Res Gestae*). This contemporary imperial text is important for the letters of Paul because the concepts *dikaioyne* and *pistis* appear several times in the Greek translation found on the walls of temples dedicated to Augustus, and Paul and his reading public would have noticed this.²⁰ These concepts are also important in Romans. The Greek terms *epeikei*, *arête* and *eirene*, which are very familiar in Paul, are also found in the *Res Gestae*. Peace and peacemaking are essential for the gospel of Augustus.²¹

We must also remember that Troas in the northwest of Asia Minor was one of the beachheads of the missionary activity of Paul, as were Philippi and Corinth. Troas was a Roman colony with Roman veterans. Troas and Corinth were connected in a special way with Julius Caesar, while Philippi was connected to Octavius Augustus. Troas and Philippi also had a close relationship to the Alexander tradition and ideology which were highly prized by Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar and influenced their propaganda and political practice.²² Not only the city of Troas (Alexandria), but also the whole region was, since the time of Homer, a memorial land of Aeneas, the son of Anchises, and the father of Ascanius.

Aeneas was the mid-point of a legendary tradition that, over the centuries, grew up not only in Etruria, Rome, and Italy, but also along the coast of Asia Minor.²³ From the coast of Asia Minor, the Aeneas legend had its start, and from there it was given new life and promul-

¹⁹ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1309. See also *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, I.1–2. In this document we are told how the deified Augustus sought to place the whole world under the sovereignty of the Roman people. This document is “chiseled upon the walls of the Temple of Rome and Augustus at Ancyra in Asia, the modern Angora.”

²⁰ *Res Gestae*, II.12–3.

²¹ Galinsky, 145.

²² Gruen, 15.

²³ Galinsky, 91–102.

gated by the new Roman rulers, especially Julius Caesar and Augustus. Augustus originally intended to move the capital of the empire to Troy, but eventually limited his intentions by transforming Troas into a Roman colony.²⁴ As a result of the propaganda of Augustus, the Aeneas legend eventually overshadowed the legend of Romulus and Remus, which earlier had exercised essentially the same function as a foundational legend.²⁵

Virgil's *Aeneid* quickly attained the illustrious position held by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Dieter Georgi put it well when he wrote: "The *Aeneid* became in relation to the Homeric epics something like the New Testament in relationship to the Old Testament for the Caesar religion, and in the end the *Aeneid* finally replaced the epic of Homer as the Bible of Hellenism."²⁶ Aeneas's Greek predecessors are perhaps more admirable from a literary point of view, because they are freer agents and less under the constraint of manifest destiny. However, because he is a disciplined instrument of destiny, Aeneas acquires the aspect of a symbol, which tends to separate him from ordinary humanity.²⁷ From one perspective, he is the ancestor of the Alban kings and of Romulus through the Julian *gens*.²⁸ Not only is he the ancestor of these two great lines, but is also the parent of the Roman people who are sometimes called the *Aeneidae*.²⁹ Aeneas is essentially a cultural construct who functions as a symbol of unity for Greeks and Romans.

Aeneas as the ancestor of both Greeks and Romans becomes the subject of discussion in this chapter. The following questions will be addressed: (1) Who is Aeneas? (2) How does Aeneas as an ancestor illuminate our understanding of Abraham? (3) What cultural and ideological factors were at play during this period? (4) What distinctive similarities are there between Abraham and Aeneas? Before proceeding with a discussion of Aeneas as an ancestor of the Greco-Roman people, we must revisit the interlocutor's question in Romans 4:1.

²⁴ John M. Cook, *The Troad: An Archaeological and Topographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 198.

²⁵ Galinsky, 103–40.

²⁶ Dieter Georgi, "Paul," (unpublished manuscript), 40–1.

²⁷ Moses Hadas, "Aeneas and the Tradition of the National Hero," *AJP* 69 (1959): 408–14.

²⁸ Galinsky, 146–8.

²⁹ Virgil, *Aen.* VIII.648. On the status of Aeneas and Rome in general, see James G. Farrow, "Aeneas and Rome," *The Classics Journal* 87 (1992): 339–59.

Continuity and Change in Romans 4:1

“What then, shall we say about Abraham our forefather according to the flesh?” (Rom 4:1). This is both a cultural and ideological question whose meaning is still opaque to most Western Christians and scholars whose knowledge of ancestors is limited. Yet the question demands from New Testament scholars a new meaning which can be appropriated in contemporary Third-World cultures, whose Christianity is affected by ancestral language. It is the voice of ethnic, cultural, and ideological pride that interrupts Paul, urgently and anxiously. The Jewish interlocutor regarded Paul’s exposition of the righteousness of God as destructive of the law precisely because the law for Jews was an integral part of their identity.³⁰ In other words, the law was the distinctive mark of nationality. From an ideological point of view, the Jewish teacher argues that Jesus stands in a tradition because he is descended from David, and ultimately from Abraham. Ideologically speaking, the Jewish teacher is saying, “Paul, with all your talk of the abolition of distinctions and divine clemency, have you not forgotten that God chose a particular people, that Abraham is the founder of a lineage?”

After the dense, explosive eschatological paragraph on the revelation of God’s righteousness through the faith of Jesus, Paul’s dialogue with the Jewish-Christian teacher resumes. It is this righteousness of God that modifies all the ideological and cultural pride the Jews had enjoyed before the coming of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of God in Romans 3:21 refers to two distinctive qualities, namely God’s own saving power or activity and God’s gift of righteousness.³¹ Romans 3:27 poses the following question: “What then, becomes of our boasting?” This is not personal pride, but rather a religious, political, and ideological pride. The word *καύχησις* is connected with judgment in Pauline literature. In other words, the Jewish interlocutor argues that the whole notion of God’s righteousness modifies all the national pride. The word refers to that which constitutes the source of pride.³²

³⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 190.

³¹ Sam K. Williams, “The Righteousness of God in Romans” *JBL* 99 (1980): 241.

³² Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 537.

The Jewish teacher is concerned about Judgment Day when all Jews will stand before the judgment bar of God to give a defense. This is a direct response to what Paul said in 3:21–26. However, Paul’s resumed dialogue with the teacher turns around the question and creatively makes faith the basis on which peoples and nations will be righteous before God. James Dunn argues, “the very fact that Paul follows on verse 6 with just this question is a clear confirmation that all the while Paul has in view Jewish overconfidence in their privileged status.”³³ We should note that, from the beginning, Paul does not quarrel with the teacher’s assumption about the importance of Abraham. The matter at issue is rather how Abraham serves as a model of God lavishing promises and blessings on whole peoples through a founding ancestor. I contend that Paul turns Abraham into a genealogical metaphor so as to reinforce the inclusion of other peoples besides Jews.

In Romans 4, readers are again confronted with Paul’s concern for peoples and nations. It is difficult to read Romans from this perspective, particularly after the Reformation and Enlightenment. A Western worldview sees Romans dealing with how God saves the individual. It is apparent in chapter 4 that Paul and his Jewish-Christian interlocutor are debating how families of people establish a kinship with God and one another.³⁴ In this debate, we sense that Jewish confidence should no longer be based on belonging to the chosen people; rather, “true confidence was based on one’s humble reliance upon God’s saving act through Christ and trust”³⁵ in God who raised the dead. Ideologically, some Jews may have thought that they inherited a status as God’s children from generation to generation, a relationship with God that other peoples did not have. But not all Jews thought so simply, so genetically or biologically.

By the second century B.C.E., Judaism was a universal religion.³⁶ One could become a Jew by conversion,³⁷ that is, by accepting the law and being circumcised. It is crucial to note that by the second century,

³³ Dunn, 191.

³⁴ Notes from Larry Welborn, 2002.

³⁵ Dunn, 192.

³⁶ Martin Goodman, “Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century,” in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed. Judith Lion, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 74.

³⁷ In the period we are investigating, conversion/*proselytos* had a dual function. Conversion was viewed as an entry into a political and social group, as well as into a religious entity.

Judaism was not only a religious force, but also a political and a social community. Thus, it was open to anyone who adopted the Jewish religious and social customs.³⁸ Any outsider who wanted to be associated with Jews was to be ritually “initiated into the community; such behavior reinforces the group’s boundary and solidarity, it does not open it up to the outside.”³⁹ It is intriguing to learn that “the majority of conversions to Judaism took place to facilitate a marriage.”⁴⁰ In any case, circumcision became a symbol of being a Jew, and it was open to Gentiles who were eager to enter a new society in Judaism.

By the time Jews went into Diaspora, Judaism was already a powerful force. In essence, it became a way of life, and conversion to such a way of life was a huge undertaking. Since conversion had a dual function, participation in Judaism was an entry into a political, social, and religious entity. It is against this background that we should try to comprehend the motive behind the Jewish teacher in Romans 4:1. The Jewish teacher argues that it was Abraham’s acceptance of the law and good works that made him the progenitor of a great chosen nation. If this is true, then everyone who takes the law as the norm of life can claim Abraham as an ancestor and belong to the covenant people.

As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul’s concern is how Gentile peoples get into the lineage so they can stand before God as righteous, rather than as enemies and aliens. The question to be addressed revolves around Paul’s and the interlocutor’s concern with ancestors and lineages—concerns that are opaque to the postmodern world. This is partly due to the Western view of the individual and the individual’s rights. The Western world sees family as the nuclear group, but for Africans, the family embraces the past, the present, and the future. Several questions are worth noting. Could it also be that we have difficulty understanding Paul because the postmodern world does not want to acknowledge a common ancestor? Could people have secret ancestors of whom they are proud, and who define their identities? Or are we blinded to Paul’s truth by ethnic and national pride?

To comprehend the debate between Paul and the Jewish teacher, we must widen the scope of our investigation. We need to critically investigate the role and function of ancestors in the world of Paul’s

³⁸ Goodman, 54.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

missionary work. In this chapter, I shall explore how Hellenistic and Roman writers of the Augustan Age shaped the Aeneas legend. Inquiry will proceed into when, how, and to what purpose the Romans embraced the legend, and what part it played in their own emerging self-consciousness. The acceptance of a Trojan figure, rather than one of Greek or Roman derivation, reveals a sense of special place within a complex of inherited cultural traditions.

The Trojan Legend: A Reconciling Ancestor

Paul and his hearers stood under the influence of an intertextuality, and the authors and addressees of Galatians 3 and Romans 4 took into account perspectives from the public which are not normally considered in exegesis. Commentaries and exegesis do not take into account the intertextuality in which people found themselves. The extent to which Roman wars of conquest destroyed and remade nations is not considered when scholars do exegesis. This is probably because Western New Testament scholars have never experienced the terrible ordeal of continuous civil and national wars that threaten the survival of their culture. The impulse to examine and glorify Aeneas received official encouragement from Augustus whose grand aim was to revive the sacred role of Rome's founding fathers. In fact, the *Aeneid* itself is the product of this impulse and we need look no further than the immediate situation and accumulated Roman tradition to explain its divergence from the Greek norm. As mentioned above, there are in fact curious parallels to Aeneas's position in the *Aeneid* in remoter literature, and even if these parallels are not mentioned in the *Aeneid*, they are worth noting as illustrations of Virgil's art and a recurrent human urge.

Social wars, discontented peasants, and slave rebellion in the first century B.C.E. were symptomatic of enormous changes in the Roman economy and production.⁴¹ The relationship between Hellenism and Roman cultural evolution threatened the cultural and political life of the Greco-Roman world. Recent scholarship has pointed out that "Roman intellectual achievements depended on Greek models and

⁴¹ Geza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 65.

inspiration rather than on the wellsprings of the native soil.”⁴² As the Roman Republic finally collapsed in civil war—first between Julius Caesar and Pompey, then between Octavian and Marc Antony—people sought an explanation for the widespread sense of dislocation and believed they found it in their rejection of the gods and values of their ancestors.⁴³

The Roman revolution of Augustus and the establishment of an international ruling elite with allegiance to the Emperor made people think about their identity. In other words, autochthony was no longer the basis of identity, but a new norm of identity was sought. It was in this revolutionary atmosphere that some Roman intellectuals began to think in earnest about religion. Their thoughts turned to ancestors. As Greeks and Romans began to share power and culture, they reworked myths of kinship to forge a new identity. After Augustus attained power in Rome in 31 B.C.E., he systematically sought to redress the situation.⁴⁴ Augustus, in healing the wounds of the civil wars of the previous hundred years and reuniting the Roman Empire, won the allegiance of millions by his policy of religious freedom and protection of established cults, including that of the Jews.⁴⁵

From this cultural and religious reform we can surmise that the Diaspora synagogue of Paul’s day was defined by a mutual context and dialogue with Roman politics, economy, and culture. Both sides in this dialogue were stamped by religion and ideology. The experiences that various peoples had with the Hellenistic environment were perpetuated in the Roman world; in many areas the Roman world continued and completed developments within the Hellenistic world, and did so consciously. In such cases, Aeneas becomes a social construct. Evidence of this intimate and fruitful contact can be found in the privileges which the Romans guaranteed the Jews. Two important witnesses provide written confirmation, namely Josephus and Philo, the latter who evaluated the Caesars before Caligula from a Jewish perspective.

⁴² Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 2.

⁴³ Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 2 (see chap. 1, n. 17).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁵ Louis H. Feldman and Meyer Reinhold, eds., *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans: Primary Readings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 83.

In restoring the Republic and creating a new political style, Augustus set in motion a program to heal Roman society.⁴⁶ The principal themes were renewal of religion and custom, *virtus*, and the honor of the Roman people.⁴⁷ Never before in the history of Rome had a ruler implemented such a grand renewal of morals and culture on the basis of ancestors. In this atmosphere of cultural renewal, the figure of Aeneas begins to fascinate Greeks and Romans. Aeneas is the ancestor of Romulus, and the legendary figure from Troy. The legend emanated in a bewildering variety of versions, invented by Greek intellectuals, modified by Sicilian historians, and eventually adapted by the Romans themselves.⁴⁸ Julius Caesar would eventually claim descent from Aeneas. But Aeneas is neither Greek nor Roman; he is a Trojan. He flees from the burning ruins of Troy and comes to Italy as an immigrant. He is welcomed to Italy by a local king, Evander, who becomes his staunchest ally. This is the version of the story told by Virgil, the Augustan poet, whose canonical epic, the *Aeneid*, creates the myth of Rome's origins. The story of Aeneas is one of self-definition. But it is also a poem of reconciliation between Greeks and Romans.⁴⁹ The question that concerns us from this point on is: on what basis was this symbiosis possible? This is where the works of Virgil and Dionysius become illuminating.

The search for identity through an ancestor who redefines kinship found its canonical form during the Age of Augustus. Roman poets and historians elevated Aeneas to be the ancestor of a number of tribes who immigrated to Rome. These immigrants fought with the "indigenous inhabitants before establishing themselves on a permanent basis."⁵⁰ At this point, I will not venture into those wars; rather, the goal is to compare Virgil's and Dionysius's presentations of Aeneas. My contention is that both works cannot be fully comprehended apart from the cultural, ideological, and political context of the Augustan Age. Likewise, we cannot fully understand Paul's presentation of Abraham in Romans 4 apart from the cultural revolution of the Augustan Age. Aeneas's role in the time of Augustus was too well entrenched to be discarded or ignored. Roman historians are quick to point out

⁴⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Gruen, *Culture and National Identity*, 3.

⁴⁹ Momigliano, 284.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

that the Augustan Age is a major turning point in the establishment of the literary Aeneas legend.⁵¹ Equally crucial was the period between “the third and second centuries B.C.E., when the Romans were making their presence felt in the cultural world of the Mediterranean.”⁵² In no way could Paul and his public have ignored this deep-seated yearning for a sense of identity.

The ultimate origin of the “Aeneas in Italy” stories need not concern us here. However, what does matter is that by the time of the Roman wars of revolution and the time of the Caesars, the hero was variously being venerated as the founder, eponym, or ancestor of a substantial number of city-states in Italy, Sicily, and the northern Aegean.⁵³ Of all these city-states, Rome was considered the strongest. By the time Virgil, Livy, and Dionysius were writing, a widely accepted chronological canon already existed, dating back at least to Fabius Pictor and to Timaeus. According to Timaeus, Rome was founded in the thirty-eighth year before the first Olympiad.⁵⁴ The story of Aeneas was not only a way of defining identity; paradoxically, it was also a means of seeking reconciliation. In both Virgil and Dionysius we see the universal implications of the Aeneas myth, as it acquires the aspect of a symbol which separates the hero from ordinary humanity. Through Silvius, he is the ancestor of the Alban kings and of Romulus, and through Julius Caesar, he becomes the ancestor of the Julian House.⁵⁵ It is compelling to discover that Aeneas becomes not just a founder but a parent of the Roman people who are sometimes called the *Aeneadae*.

At the time of Augustus, “the myth of Aeneas was central to the Roman ideology and helped to serve Augustus’s cultural and political reforms.”⁵⁶ Faced with an influx of immigrants, especially Greeks, intellectuals sought to find a common ancestor in Aeneas. One thing we know for certain is that the Romans needed the cooperation of the Greek upper classes to govern the territories they had conquered. Above all, they needed the intelligence and knowledge of the Greeks to make the Empire work as a whole. Conventional wisdom says that

⁵¹ James G. Farrow, “Aeneas and Rome: Pseudepigrapha and Politics,” *The Classical Journal* 87/4 (1992): 339.

⁵² Gruen, 1.

⁵³ J. Bremmer and N. M. Horsfall, *Roman Myth and Mythography* (London: University of London, 1987), 13.

⁵⁴ *Dion.Hal.Rom.Ant.* 1.74.

⁵⁵ Hadas, 408.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the Roman intellectual achievements depended on Greek models and inspiration rather than on the wellsprings of native soil.⁵⁷ Even exploiting the East and Africa required the cooperation of the Greeks. Thus, the Aeneas myth had to become a story of Greek and Roman collaboration if it were to be really useful in the new situation. According to Erich Gruen, the Aeneas myth “has received a variety of characterizations: a love-hate relationship, the working out of an inferiority complex, a creative tension.”⁵⁸ The myth helped to shape Rome’s distinctive image in the midst of a conglomeration of cultures.

Roman historians presented the Romans as descendants of Trojan immigrants, and the foundation of Rome as a further occasion for collecting stragglers of dubious reputation.⁵⁹ We must ask when, how, and to what cultural and ideological purpose the Romans embraced the story of Aeneas, and what part it played in their own emerging self-consciousness. Surely the acceptance of a Trojan rather than a Greek or Roman derivative ancestor reveals a sense of special place in the complex of inherited cultural traditions. The manipulation of the legend in international diplomacy allows insight into the image Rome projected in the Mediterranean world.⁶⁰ Rome’s adoption of the legend allows us to comprehend Paul’s creative interpretation of Abraham as the spiritual ancestor of all who have faith in God. In the Aeneas story, we see a religious figure raised to a divinity. Aeneas and Abraham are alike in that they are raised to superhuman stature and in effect canonized as subsuming and symbolizing a group’s national character and aspirations.

The nationalism of the *Aeneid* and the exaltation of Aeneas can be adequately explained on the basis of Roman mores and traditions and of the political atmosphere of the Augustan Age. People living during the time of Augustus experienced a major transition in history. Rome had emerged from the terrible ordeal of continuous civil war which had threatened body and spirit, and the release and enlargement issued in a surge of proud national consciousness.⁶¹ Thus, the impulse to examine and celebrate the national heritage received official

⁵⁷ Gruen, 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Momigliano, 268.

⁶⁰ Gruen, 3.

⁶¹ Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 1–5, 101–239.

encouragement, and the works of Virgil and Dionysius are most likely the products of this impulse.

In times of civil and colonial wars, people place a high value on their national traditions, and cherish them more fully when the survival of those traditions is threatened, and most intensely when nationality is lost. I contend that the wistful loyalty evoked by threatened extinction tends to find expression in the examination and glorification of inherited national traditions to an even greater degree than does the proud consciousness of national success (as was evident during the Augustan Age). In most cases, people express fierce loyalty to national traditions during periods when colonial powers erase national distinctions and impose their own cultures. In the case of the Mediterranean world, such periods followed the conquest of Alexander the Great and then Rome itself. The response to the challenge of foreign domination will be discussed more fully in chapter four. For now, I want to emphasize that ancestors are vital in helping to elevate a people's consciousness in times of political unrest.

The problems in glorifying personal heroes and making them the focus and bearers of national ideals and aspirations are both culturally and ideologically massive. For example, the amalgamation of individual traditions like the Aeneas legend raises patriotic pride at the expense of other less powerful cultures. Those who are the objects of this oppression, whose political independence has been suppressed, will turn to religion in an effort to assert the antiquity and dignity of individual heroes. This is where we find Aeneas and Abraham playing an illuminating role in both Jewish-Hellenistic and Greco-Roman cultures. Both heroes embody strong cultural beliefs.

In the Zimbabwean Shona and Greco-Roman world views, ancestors are glorified through tales containing miraculous stories. Of all the literary efforts calculated to ensure the cultural survival of depressed minorities in the Hellenistic world, the works of Josephus and Philo are the most extensive in detail. The Jews in Diaspora were not willing to surrender their traditions so they elevated their founders to prove to the Greeks and Romans that their nation had a sacred history. Jewish and Greco-Roman historians relate that when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, Johanan ben Zakkai spirited himself out of the city with a band of young people and vowed to transform Judaism from a nationality to a way of life guided by a peculiar body of cultural traditions. The same thing happened with the Jews in Alexandria during the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus. These Jews devoted themselves to producing

a body of apologetic literature (of which the LXX is the best specimen) to demonstrate the antiquity and high merits of Jewish tradition. I intend to show that Hellenistic Judaism and Greco-Roman culture were working side by side, and both helped to shape Paul's interpretation of not only Abraham, but of the gospel as a whole.

It would appear that in the Hellenistic world of the Augustan Age, the impulse to assert and glorify national founders was expressed by elevating the character and history of a central figure of the nation's remote history. The prime examples of this process are found in the works of Virgil and Dionysius. Both authors attempt to show that Rome's place in history is predestined by the gods and that its history in future years should embrace the whole universe. Like Daniel, Aeneas is an inspirational figure to his followers. Enoch, who is the hero of a whole group of apocalypses going back to the second century B.C.E., is a vivid personification of a divine figure who received and transmitted special revelations. Joseph (in Genesis 19) is also a Jewish hero whose life and adventures match those of Aeneas and other heroes of the Mediterranean world. I intend to demonstrate how Virgil and Dionysius presented Aeneas as a canonized hero, in a manner which is virtually unexampled in classical literature but rather similar to Abraham's portrayal in Hellenistic-Jewish literature. I will now turn to an examination of the central trajectories, motifs, and notions that make Aeneas an ancestor of both Greeks and Romans.

Virgil and Dionysius: Presuppositions

Before Dionysius and Virgil wrote their works, Aeneas was already a popular figure among Greeks and Romans. We learn from Greco-Roman scholars that by late fifth century B.C.E., the Greeks had claimed Aeneas to be the founder or co-founder of Rome.⁶² On the other hand, the Romans had some reservations with this idea, because they considered Romulus to be their founder. For the purposes of consolidating the empire, the Romans sought to collaborate with other Latin cities such as Lavinium and Alba Longa,⁶³ whose claim to Trojan ancestry was well established. Thus we see the figure being drawn into a symbol of reconciliation and friendship. Not only that, but as the Romans

⁶² Momigliano, 274.

⁶³ Galinsky, 103–41.

extended their influence into the Mediterranean world they claimed descent from Aeneas and exploited this figure diplomatically.

We must observe how the Greeks and Romans used Aeneas, especially in the second and third centuries. Aeneas provided a powerful pedigree to both nations, so much so that both could speak on behalf of the Trojans and their descendants. In times of war between the Acarnians and Aetolians, the Romans protected the Acarnians who had not fought the Trojans. After Troy was destroyed by wars, some of its inhabitants were taken prisoners by Seuleucus, king of Sysria, and the Romans called upon the king to free the Troad prisoners. All this was done under the pretext that Aeneas was an ancestor of the Romans. The Romans felt it their duty to protect their brothers and sisters who were left behind in Troy. Hence the Romans learned to play the game of claiming a powerful ancestor who would assist them in establishing an imperial rule.

In the beginning of the first Punic War, we are told that the Sicilians of Segesta killed the Carthaginians and later sought reconciliation with the Greeks because of their common descent from Aeneas.⁶⁴ In another tradition, we learn that citizens of towns around Rome were anxious to remain attached to the people of Rome and Lavinium because of the connection to Aeneas. Thus, we see that Aeneas helped the Romans claim a place of dominance in Sicily as well as in the Greek East. This helps us understand the motive behind Rome's ancestral claims; she was eager to be accepted by the Greeks and others in the Mediterranean world. This is true because in the second century B.C.E., the Romans controlled all of metropolitan Greece and were extending their grip over the Asiatic Greeks, not to mention the Greeks of Italy.⁶⁵ Here we have a vivid exploitation of the Aeneas legend as the Romans seek cooperation from the Greek upper classes, for the Romans needed the Greeks' knowledge and intelligence to make the empire work as a whole.⁶⁶ The intriguing part is that the Aeneas story was being reshaped into a myth of reconciliation and collaboration between Greeks and Romans. In the end, the Aeneas myth was further exploited to support the political ideology of the Julian-Claudian family. Regardless of many traditions, we have the story of Aeneas told

⁶⁴ Momigliano, 278.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

by both Dionysius and Virgil, who were eyewitnesses to the Augustan Age. It is to these that I will now turn.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus

The historian and rhetorician Dionysius wrote that "Rome's founders were in reality Greeks, and Greeks from no mean tribes, and that these founders were pious and brave."⁶⁷ He claimed to be an eyewitness to the beginning of the reign of Augustus Caesar.⁶⁸ In Books I and II, Dionysius reminds readers that even before Aeneas came to Italy, the ancestors of the Trojans were originally Greeks who had come from the same district of Greece.⁶⁹ He cites the Pelasgians who were already in Greece as representatives of Greek origin.⁷⁰ As part of his mission, Dionysius offers us successive bands of immigrants who settled in Italy; these he lists in order, starting with the Aborigines,⁷¹ Pelasgians,⁷² the Arcadian colonizers under Evander,⁷³ and the Heracles.⁷⁴ Dionysius's interpretation of these bands strikes a distinctive note about Rome's origins. The goal of presenting Rome's origins as wholly Greek pervades all his work.

It is interesting to note that Dionysius wrote for apologetic purposes, as he aimed at winning support from both Greeks and Romans. For the benefit of Romans and Greeks alike, he was forever discerning antique examples of Roman virtue, and making them public to the world.⁷⁵ I will later address the concept of virtue, which is central to a discussion of Aeneas as an ancestor of the Greeks and Romans. For now suffice it to say that Dionysius's portrayal of Aeneas was designed to make the origins of Rome wholly Greek in every respect. This was necessary before Dionysius could pursue his concept of a single Greco-

⁶⁷ *Dion.Hal.* I.xiii.

⁶⁸ *Dion.Hal.* I.2–3. He says that "I arrived in Italy at the very time that Augustus Caesar put an end to the civil war, in the middle of the one hundred and eighty-seventh Olympiad, and having from that time to this present day, a period of twenty-two years, lived at Rome, learned the language of the Romans and acquainted myself with their writings."

⁶⁹ *Dion.Hal.* I.xx.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Dion.Hal.* I.60.3, I.89.1–2.

⁷² *Dion.Hal.* I.31, I.60.3, I.89.2.

⁷³ *Dion.Hal.* I.41–4.

⁷⁴ *Dion.Hal.* I.60–1.

⁷⁵ Michael Grant, *Roman Myths* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 44.

Roman world in which the Greeks inaugurated civilization.⁷⁶ In Dionysius, we find that the origins of Rome are not just through Greeks, but they have divine sanction; this allowed the Romans to view the expansion of their empire as a divine mandate. All of this hinged on Dionysius making Aeneas Greek, though he was a Trojan.

How is Dionysius able to accomplish this task? The answer is through a common racial origin. According to Dionysius, the Trojans themselves were Greeks, and came to Asia from the Peloponnese.⁷⁷ In Dionysius's version of the story, Aeneas encounters King Latinus when he lands in Italy with his band of immigrants.⁷⁸ Latinus decides to make war against Aeneas. In defense of the whole band, Aeneas steps forward and declares that he and all his people are wandering natives of Troy, who have come to Greece in obedience to the commands of the gods.⁷⁹ After a detailed explanation and prayer-like petition, Aeneas declares himself to be wholly Greek. In response, Latinus is convinced that he should share power and land with Aeneas and his people. He declares to Aeneas: "Nay, but I cherish a kindly feeling towards the whole Greek race and am greatly grieved by the inevitable calamities of mankind."⁸⁰ Here again, we have reconciliation between Greeks and Romans and the creative construction of a new shared identity based on the spirit of friendship. The message is clear: the Roman Empire will prosper if the descendants of King Latinus cherish kindly and humane feelings towards the immigrants.

Dionysius was determined to make Aeneas the sacred founder of both Greeks and Romans. The sacrificial language in I.57.1–3 will enrich our appreciation of Paul's use of this paradigm in Romans 4:1–25. An important aspect of this form of reconciliation revolves around signing treaties.⁸¹ The point that John North alludes to is that the incorporation of a new deity into the life of a city-state was something that had force of a treaty. In the Greco-Roman world (as in Third-World coun-

⁷⁶ This synthesis has been well done by Momigliano, who argued, "Dionysius of Halicarnassus had only one serious ambition. He wanted the Romans to be Greeks—not pure Greeks, which was impossible, but as Greek as possible," 281. See also Gruen, 7.

⁷⁷ *Dion.Hal.* I.61.

⁷⁸ *Dion.Hal.* I.58.2–3.

⁷⁹ *Dion.Hal.* I.58.3.

⁸⁰ *Dion.Hal.* I.58.5.

⁸¹ For a detailed explanation on treaties, see John North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed., Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 174–93.

tries today), treaties were strong seals which allowed both foreigners and indigenous peoples to share land and space. In Dionysius's story, we are confronted with the highest form of colonization where we encounter Aeneas beginning to build cities like Lavinium. Aeneas then unified races through marriages between natives and immigrants.⁸² In Dionysius we see that Aeneas and his immigrant band will eventually exercise colonial rule, a prophetic anticipation of the Roman Empire's domination. So Aeneas is an ideologically constructed ancestor.

Aeneas served a pivotal role in the Julian house. As Romans expanded influence into the Greek-speaking areas of Italy in the fourth century, they thereby provided the impetus for foundation stories fitted into the complex web of Hellenic legend.⁸³ Thus, Aeneas became a powerful reconciling symbol to all nations under Augustan rule. Confronting a Greek-speaking Mediterranean world in the third century B.C.E., Rome found it politically and culturally useful to claim Aeneas as its founder; he was famous from his appearance in Homer but was also an enemy of the Greeks.⁸⁴ Both the *Aeneid* and Dionysius were eager to promote the Aeneas legend to mean a reconciliation of nations. Dionysius seems to regard the Romans as passive recipients of the Trojan legend. While this is not the focus of this book, we need to be cautious in our reading of these ancient epics. I contend that when Aeneas landed in Italy, the country was probably experiencing civil unrest or war. Aeneas was a powerful figure who should be seen in our time as a colonial figure. Second, we need to emphasize that the Romans had their own indigenous traditions to explain the foundation of the city. A case in point is the story of Romulus and Remus. However, for the purpose of this book, we must remember that Rome considered itself to be Trojan, because the Caesars wanted to link themselves to a strong founding figure. For Augustus, Aeneas served for both cultural awakening and a sense of identity.

Another motif that is central to this discussion of Aeneas is *pietas*. In some sources, Aeneas is referred to as Pius. The origin of Aeneas's piety is traced back to the period when the Greeks attacked the Trojans and

⁸² See *Dion.Hal.* 1.59.1–2. “And their kings setting the example united the excellence of the two races, the native and the foreign, by ties of marriage, Latinus giving his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas.”

⁸³ Gruen, 15.

⁸⁴ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary: The Ultimate Reference Work on the Classical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.

set their city on fire, and Aeneas rescued his father and the gods of his ancestors from the burning ruins of Troy.⁸⁵ As a result, he acquired a reputation for piety. This motif gained popularity during the Augustan Age when it was used as an emblem of Rome's identity. The emblem was also found on coins during the time of Augustus.

This search for identity through an ancestor who defines kinship and identity can also be found at the end of Cicero's *Republic* in the mysterious Sornium Scipionis. Scipio Africanus appears to Scipio Aemelianus in a dream. In this dream, the grandfather advises his grandson to exercise *justitia* and *pietas* and promises him immortality. In other traditions, we are told that Aeneas established cities and the two most outstanding cities were Lavinium and Alba Longa.⁸⁶ It is crucial to remember that Lavinium became the center of sacrifices for all Roman leaders at the beginning and end of their terms of office. In fact, the Aeneas cult was established at Lavinium and survived until the time of the Julian house. As an African, I can surmise that Lavinium was a land where ancestors' graves were located and as such it was an important religious and cultural center. The Penates who were worshipped at Lavinium were those of the Romans and also of the Latins.

Galinsky argued that "the Lavinian Penates were Trojanized and connected with Aeneas, and thus came to be considered the ancestral gods of Rome."⁸⁷ Dionysius wrote an entire tractate dedicated to the religious and political significance of Lavinium and Alba Longa. We are told that the Latin people erected hero shrines in honor of their founding ancestors.⁸⁸ Temples containing Trojan gods were an important feature in the Roman world. Dionysius records the following illuminating inscription found in one of the temples:

In the town thou buildest worship undying found
To gods ancestral; guard them. Sacrifice, Adore
with choirs. For whilst these holy things in thy
Land remain, Zeus' daughter's gifts of old

⁸⁵ See Pseudo-Xenophon, *Cynegeticus* 1.15 where it is recorded that "Αἰνείας δὲ σώσας μὲν τοὺς πατρώους καὶ μητρώους Θεοὺς, σώσας δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν πατέρα δόξαν εὐσέβειας ἐξήνέγκατο, ὥστε καὶ πολέυιοι μόνῳ ἐκείνῳ ὧν ἐκρατήσαν ἐν Τροίᾳ ἔδοσαν μὴ συληθῆναι."

⁸⁶ Galinsky, 146.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁸⁸ *Dion.Hal.* I.64.4–5, I.65.1–2, and I.66.1–5.

Bestowed upon thy spouse, secure from harm
Thy city shall abide forevermore.⁸⁹

While this poem does not directly refer to Aeneas, it shows how the veneration of ancestors was well established in the Greco-Roman world.

Roman historians like Livy were quick to point out that Aeneas was worshipped at Lavinium under the name of Indiges, Pater Indiges, or Jupiter Indiges.⁹⁰ Dionysius had one ambition in his writings, namely, to make Rome as Greek as possible through Aeneas. Virgil, as will be shown, took a more radical step in his presentation of Aeneas. Unlike Dionysius, Virgil made Aeneas truly pious and turned the hero's flight from Troy to his praise.⁹¹ I will return to this notion of piety later; for now we must note that in both writers, piety was the central Roman virtue, one every ruler was supposed to practice. This virtue was connected to peace, justice, moderation, and temperance. Dionysius's work was designed to make Aeneas a central religious figure in Rome. Dionysius goes much further in uniting Evander and Aeneas, for in pursuit of his determination to make Rome's origins wholly Greek he persistently declares that Aeneas too was Greek, since Troy had been a Greek city.

In Book VII, Dionysius writes about the similarity between Roman and Greek games. He claims that the Trojans who had migrated from the Peloponnese to Asia were genetically Greek.⁹² Hence, Aeneas was biologically a Greek ancestor. The motifs in Dionysius and Virgil vary slightly, but the underlying motivation of the two writers is the same. Having finished our investigation of Dionysius's portrayal of Aeneas, we now turn to Virgil's depiction of Aeneas as an ancestor.

Virgil and the Augustan Context

The works of Dionysius and Virgil are crucial to this study because they provide the most extensive portrayals of Aeneas as an ancestor. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas occupies a central position. In fact, Virgil's work can be categorized as a canonical work on the figure of Aeneas. The

⁸⁹ *Dion.Hal.* 68.5.

⁹⁰ See Livy, 1.2.6; see also *Aen.* XII.794–5.

⁹¹ Galinsky, 50.

⁹² *Dion.Hal.* I.61.

nationalism of the *Aeneid* and the exaltation of Aeneas can be sufficiently explained on the basis of Roman mores and traditions and of the political atmosphere of the Augustan Age. We cannot fully understand the ancestral role and function of Aeneas apart from the Augustan Age.⁹³ Augustus saw his role as the guardian of the Roman religio-culture, and found Aeneas to be the embodiment of Roman identity. As a founder and parent of Rome, Aeneas provided Augustus with a powerful pedigree, something Rome desperately needed to build a powerful empire with an amalgamation of many nationalities. In essence, the *Aeneid* is about people—Trojans, Greeks, Carthaginians and Italians—and to discuss the issues of the poem is to discuss the amalgamation of these nationalities whose pedigree is rooted in Aeneas. While schools of thought have identified Virgil's main purpose to be praising Aeneas, a cross-cultural perspective would assert that Virgil's intent was to show Aeneas as a worthy first ancestor of Augustus, in whose honor the poem was written. While it may be a political and ideological manifesto, the *Aeneid* is also a spiritual testimony to Virgil's love for the founders of Italy.

From the beginning to the end of the poem we are struck by the function of fate, as the energy behind the success of Rome. Some scholars have identified this fate as "the destiny of the world, not of individuals, and it acts on a plane that is wholly suprapersonal."⁹⁴ The poem consists of a connection and succession of causes held together by a providential, universal overview; fate is a cosmic necessity sanctioned by an unchangeable other world.⁹⁵ In the African religion, fate is the power beyond human comprehension and can only be experienced in times of crisis. On the other hand, Gordon Williams reads fate as a retrospective expression of what happens in history, symbolic and illuminating, but not causal.⁹⁶ This fate is well played out in Virgil and is the thread that ties the books of the poem together.

⁹³ See Palmer-Bonz, who argues that "Virgil's work cannot be fully understood apart from the political and social context of the Augustan Age," 36.

⁹⁴ G. Williams, "Some Aspects of Roman Marriage Ceremonies and Ideals," *JRS* 48 (1958): 16–29.

⁹⁵ G. B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 161.

⁹⁶ G. Williams, *Technique and Ideas in the Aeneid* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 3–16.

Virgil differs from Dionysius in that he does not regard Rome as directly stemming from a series of Greek immigrants. Virgil's story is that "from Aeneas came the Latin race, the Lords of the Alba Longa, and the lofty city of Rome."⁹⁷ Among other things Virgil emphasizes the involvement of the gods in rescuing Aeneas, his father Anchises, and his son Ascanius from the burning city. With him too, were the household gods of Troy, destined like himself for a new home. The *Aeneid* is distinctive in that it is an epic focused on narrating great events, heroes, kings, wars, and eventually the great establishment of a powerful city.

The *Aeneid* records the journeys, adventures, and wars Aeneas encountered with success as he made his way to finding a new home of both Greeks and Romans. This is similar to the call of Abraham in Genesis, and the events Abraham experienced on his journey to the Promised Land. Central to the events in both Genesis and the *Aeneid* is the presence of divine guidance in establishing the mission of both men and in enabling them to fulfill it.⁹⁸ It is easy for a cross-cultural reader to discern the three distinctive pieces that give Virgil's poem depth and substance. The first piece, at the heart of the poem's Augustan ideology, is Jupiter's prophecy of eternal Roman rule in Book I.⁹⁹ The second piece is found in Book VI where we are told of Anchises's pageant of heroes, and the third piece is about Vulcan's shield for Aeneas in Book VIII. These three pieces seem to express the moral message of the poem, which in turn reflects Virgil's own convictions about the reign of Augustus.

In *Aeneid* I.1–7, Virgil writes about the power of gods in raising Aeneas from the coast of Troy culminating in the foundations of noble Rome.¹⁰⁰ This is similar to the call of Abraham in Genesis. In essence, the *Aeneid* is the record of a journey with a divine mission. Like the Genesis story, the *Aeneid* is a movement under the gods and Aeneas is just a trustworthy vessel. Virgil writes that after Aeneas left Troy, he camped at different sites where Jupiter assured him that his mission would be fulfilled. The gods reveal to Aeneas that the empire which Rome is destined to rule will be without temporal or spatial limits.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Grant, 44.

⁹⁸ Palmer-Bonz, 40.

⁹⁹ *Aen.* I.275–80.

¹⁰⁰ *Aen.* I.1–7.

¹⁰¹ *Aen.* I.278–9.

Aeneas faced struggles but the divine oracles continually reminded him that he had been chosen for the great mission of establishing the city of Rome. Divine guidance is conferred not only on Aeneas, but also on the entire Trojan remnant and their descendants. Like the followers of Abraham, Aeneas and the Trojan remnant are described as blessed.

In Book II, 293–7, Aeneas is instructed to establish a new city with new people after his travels are ended. From beginning to end, Aeneas's task is imbued with a sacred meaning, and his obedience to the gods made him a perfect symbol of *fides*. Coupled with this sacredness is the incident of Aeneas's descent to the underworld where he encounters Dido. Virgil likely wanted to link Aeneas with Odysseus who made a similar journey to the underworld. The difference is that Aeneas's journey is endowed with sacred meaning. Tradition says that beneath the underground is the sacred shrine of the Greek god Apollo. It was this very cult of Apollo (the brilliant Hellenic civilizer) that Augustus exalted as his token of the reconciliation between the worlds of Greece and Rome.¹⁰²

While in the underworld, Aeneas meets his dead father who, under divine empowerment, discloses to him the future glories of Rome, which will reach their climax under the rule of Augustus. Anchises directs Aeneas to the river Lethe, where he meets with souls who have been cleansed of sin and are waiting to drink the waters of forgetfulness and be reborn. Virgil proceeds to say that these souls were destined to become the heroes and famous leaders of Roman history. The prophecy begins to find fulfillment in the earliest kings of Alba Longa and reaches its climax with the birth of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome. An intriguing aspect of the *Aeneid* is that it disrupts the chronology of leaders and quickly brings in Augustus Caesar who is described as the son of a god and the second founder of Rome.¹⁰³ He is the descendant of Aeneas destined to usher in the return of the Golden Age, and fated to extend the empire beyond the boundaries of the known world. Again, Aeneas is depicted as the universal ancestor, a factor that Paul would turn upside down in his interpretation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25.

¹⁰² Grant, 45.

¹⁰³ *Aen.* VI.791–2.

Like Dionysius, Virgil tells us about the treaties that Aeneas entered into when he arrived in Italy. He had friendly relations with Latins and the king of the Aborigines who had ruled at Laurentum. The gods appeared to the king of the Aborigines and instructed him to offer his daughter in marriage to Aeneas. When Aeneas arrived in Italy, we learn from Virgil that King Evander had kinship ties with his Trojan visitor Aeneas. Here again, we have a striking story attesting a connection between Greeks and Romans. This kinship affiliation carried both cultural and political implications. Aeneas is not just a cultural construct but a political and ideological construct.

Julius Caesar, the adopted father of Octavian/Augustus Caesar, claimed Aeneas as his ancestor and even used Aeneas as a symbol on Roman coins. In fact the coin type of Aeneas and Anchises reappeared as early as 42 B.C.E. to announce Octavian's own dynastic claims.¹⁰⁴ Monuments in commemoration of Aeneas were erected during the Augustan regime, and an Altar of Peace depicted sacrificial scenes being presided over by Aeneas. Thus, the Aeneas tradition gained prominence during the time of the Julii family and reached its climax during the reign of Augustus Caesar. We read from Roman historians that in Augustus's time, a Temple of Mars was erected where sacrifices were offered to the Roman gods. The temple was flanked on one side by images of the heroes of the Monarchy and Republic, but on the other by ancestors of the Julian house, with Aeneas at the head.¹⁰⁵

In Virgil, we clearly perceive that Aeneas was Augustus's forerunner, who deserved to be emulated by all Roman leaders. As such, the ancestral emphasis on the interpretation of Aeneas as the man of Roman destiny *par excellence* achieves its climax during the time of Augustus. Like Abraham in the Greco-Roman world, Aeneas was unique among the Trojans in that he had a future as well as a past. The past was determined by the gods and the future had a sacred meaning whose essence was realized during the Roman conquest of other nations. We will discuss this fact later when we compare Aeneas and Abraham. For now we need to note that during the time when Romans was written, there was a persistent tradition, at least from the fourth century B.C.E.,

¹⁰⁴ Grant, 46.

¹⁰⁵ See Paul Zanker whose book contains a chapter entitled "The New Imagery in the Private Sphere," 265–95.

and presumably earlier, of elevation of ancestors. The fascination in ancestors was probably difficult for Paul to overlook.¹⁰⁶

Two distinctive features make Paul's letter to the Romans particularly useful for cross-cultural inquiry. First, Paul was responding to some specific religio-cultural issues in the life of one of the local communities in the Greco-Roman world. Second, there are some cultural materials (which provide glimpses of ancestor worship) and ideological beliefs common to Paul's audiences. In addition, Acts of the Apostles was written by someone who most likely was a companion of Paul making it possible that he/she was an eyewitness to the culture and beliefs of Paul's audience.

At this point I will address the cross-cultural world of Pauline Christianity. The term 'cross-cultural' has a double meaning, referring not only to the world of early Christianity but also to the world view of the early believers. In other words, early Christians perceived and gave meaning to the world through their group symbols and ideological beliefs. In essence, they had two world views, namely, the world they shared with others cultures that resided in the Roman Empire and the world they constructed through sharing Aeneas. Here again we confront Aeneas being used as a symbol of unity and identity.

The cross-cultural world of Paul was imbued with "a cluster of beliefs expressed in an elaborate system of institutions and rituals."¹⁰⁷ There was probably a wide display and widespread reduplication of Aeneas images on temples, coins, and Greek vases. In Etruria, many vases were discovered, giving us ample evidence that Aeneas was elevated as a powerful symbol and, most importantly, that the cult of Aeneas persisted for an extended period. Both Greeks and Romans had a fascination with Aeneas, and so venerated him as a founding figure. In any case, Greeks and Romans shared the same world view. The Romans in particular "accepted that the safety and prosperity of their communities depended upon the gods, whose favor was won and held by the correct performance of the full range of cult practices inherited from the past."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ See Acts 17:1–34, especially verses 23ff where Luke records Paul's experience: "For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."

¹⁰⁷ Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, eds., *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 163.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

In light of all that we have in Virgil, we can surmise that the foundations of Rome were a mixture of sacredness and deep religious symbolism. In a poignant manner, Virgil ends Book VI by saying: "You Romans, be sure to rule the world, to crown peace with justice, to spare the vanquished and to crush the proud."¹⁰⁹ The issue to be stressed is that Rome's power was to be exercised with humility and compassion, thereby accommodating other nationalities with the hope of building commonwealth for all nations. In essence, the world which Rome was to build was to be based on the reconciliation of Greeks and Romans. The participants of this modest and humane world were descended from the gods and were blessed. In the period of Virgil, Romans perceived their empire with a high sense of mission of which the climax was the Augustan Age.

In Book VI, Virgil draws a distinctive line between Odysseus and Aeneas. In this part of the poem, Aeneas acquires a higher status mainly in that he represents a specifically Roman ideal, disciplined and institutionalized in consonance with the spirit of the Augustan Age. Aeneas begins to perceive a clear picture of the divine prophecy unfolding before him. The high point of the story comes in Book VII where the prophecy begins to materialize when in response to the oracle, King Latinus welcomes Aeneas and offers his daughter in marriage to Aeneas. The final resolve comes in Book VIII where Virgil depicts the ultimate glorious rise of Rome and the successful fulfillment of its central role in the divine plan of peace and reconciliation. Through Silvius, Aeneas is the ancestor of the Alban kings and of Romulus, through *Julus* of the Julian *gens*.

In fact, Aeneas is not only the founder of these two great lines, but also the parent of the Roman people who are sometimes called *Aeneadae*.¹¹⁰ As a founder and parent of Greeks and Romans, Aeneas possessed in him all the values which his descendants inherited. Before we discuss these values, it is beneficial for us to briefly focus on the elevation of Aeneas as an intercultural ancestor for all the nations who were under the rule of the Roman Empire.

¹⁰⁹ *Aen.* VI.853.

¹¹⁰ *Aen.* VIII.648.

The Aeneid as an Epic of Ancestor Elevation

Critics have agreed that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* differ from the *Aeneid*,¹¹¹ mainly in that the *Aeneid* is essentially an epic of national glory symbolized by the elevation of Aeneas as an international/inter-cultural hero. Put differently, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are essentially works of personal glory, and the *Aeneid* is an epic of divinely sanctioned destiny. From Books I to XII, Virgil portrays Aeneas as a war general whose objective mission was to subdue and govern the world assigned to Rome, and of the divine guardianship of which Rome was the object. From the outset, Aeneas leaves Troy to come to Italy by fate's decree, and on the way he suffers immensely from the enmity of Juno even though he fulfills the will of fate. The elevation of Aeneas as an international ancestor is marked by the hero's *pietas*.¹¹² This quality made Aeneas the "single human prototype to stand for the varied and complex experience of a larger group of people."¹¹³

It is crucial to underline the fact that *pietas* was the single value that defined Rome's superiority over all nations. This quality allowed Rome to have a firm trust in the great destiny which attended them from immemorial past. Throughout the *Aeneid*, we are confronted with the poet's constant desire to present Aeneas' *pietas*. In the poem, Aeneas displays qualities of melancholy and nostalgia, both of which help to depict his *pietas* in the face of adversity.¹¹⁴ The first oracles that Aeneas receives in the course of his wanderings are imbued with the promise of universal dominion.

In any case, patriotism in the Age of Augustus was as much an Italian as a Roman sentiment. The military genius of Rome was even more identified with the spirit and power of their renowned ancestors. It was Virgil's aim to show that the enterprise of Aeneas was the foundation upon which the kings of Alba and Rome and successive generations of great men under the republic had successfully labored, and on which Augustus had placed the coping stone. This enterprise was no mere work of human hands, but had been designed and built

¹¹¹ This distinction is explicitly made by W. Y. Sellar in *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age: Virgil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 324.

¹¹² '*Pietas*' in this book refers to Aeneas's love of family as well as for the *sacra* and *Penates* of one's tribe.

¹¹³ Galinsky, 3.

¹¹⁴ C. J. Mackie, *The Characterization of Aeneas: Scottish Classical Studies* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 20.

up by divine purpose and guidance. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is a symbol of both religious and national sentiment. In the midst of hardships, Aeneas is portrayed as a wandering loyal instrument in the hands of the divinities and his mission is to build a new home in Italy.¹¹⁵ Not only does he wander, but he wanders under divine guidance from Europe and from Asia to the coast of Libya. The Romans recognized the powers of these divinities, and in most cases sacrificed to them, just as Aeneas sacrificed to the gods throughout his wandering from the burning ruins of Troy to Italy.

It was the awe of an ever-present invisible power, manifesting itself by arbitrary songs, and working out its own purposes through Aeneas that made him a *pius* figure in Roman history. On reflection we could assert that in six different happenings in Book I, Aeneas is depicted as a despondent hero and that in each case the poet stresses his piety.¹¹⁶ The piety of Aeneas is a distinctive element in our effort to construct a cross-cultural paradigm suitable for the interpretation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25. However, piety and fate are inseparable in that the latter is the mysterious power behind the establishment of Rome. This impersonal power is to the Romans both the object of awe and the source of their confidence. *Pietas* became one of the most important leitmotifs of the Augustan Age.¹¹⁷ At a deeper level, Aeneas saw himself as its willing instrument, cooperating with it, blindly sometimes and sometimes remissly, and for every failure of intelligence or vigilance, punished by temporal calamities.

The word Virgil uses for this impersonal power (or perhaps we should say undefined power) is “fate,” or more often used in the plural, *fata*. It is by the fates that the action is set in motion and directed to its issue. The characters in the *Aeneid*, including Aeneas, are instruments in the hands of the fates, some more, some less conscious of the part they are playing. Even Jupiter is represented as only cognizant of the fates rather than as their originator. In Book I, 257–285, Jupiter replies that nothing has changed, for the fates are firm that Aeneas will found Rome. He proceeds to spell out the future glories of Rome,

¹¹⁵ *Aen.* I.378–9.

¹¹⁶ The six different happenings can be listed as follows: (1) the storm and misfortune (81–222), (2) the appearance of his mother (305–407), (3) the view of the city (418–40), (4) the view of the temple and its pictures (441–93), (5) the sight of Dido (494–508), and (6) the sight of his men (509–19).

¹¹⁷ Zanker, 102.

the Italian wars, Alba Longa, and the Jullii descended from Julius himself. Because of Aeneas's *fides*, Roman greatness will know no bounds, and the glory of Rome will continue with the rule of Augustus. Every reader of the *Aeneid* feels the predominance of this idea throughout the entire poem. In essence, fate permeates the Virgilian epic. It is because of faith/*fides* in divine guidance and assistance that Aeneas and his men were able to successfully establish a city.

We must note that the hero's wanderings were not only for the purpose of finding a city, but to introduce a new worship into Italy as well. The sacred emblems which Aeneas brought to Italy were his divine companions in whom he trusted. Aeneas's *pietas* comes more and more to signify the relationship of his actions to the course of fate.¹¹⁸ Moreover, his piety appears in the faith which he has in his mission, and in the trust which he has in divine guidance. Prayer was his first resource in all emergencies; sacrifice and thanksgiving were the accompaniments of all his escapes from difficulty and danger. This element will be crucial in our comparison of Aeneas and Abraham. For now it suffices to note that Aeneas is a fitting instrument to carry out the purpose of a power working secretly for a distant end.

An intriguing part of the whole poem is how the fates make their will known through events like the omen of cakes and the white sow with her litter. These were signs of divine revelation regarding the future of Italy. I contend that Virgil did not originate these omens, but that they were a common cultural feature of his day. Virgil used these omens to clarify to his readers that Rome is a city with ancient religious significance. In some way, we can argue that the gods who took part in the whole action were of Greek invention, but the power they were obliged to obey was essentially Roman. The poem's theological theme seems to center around this power—a power that uses omens and miracles to influence the hero to establish a universal empire in the hands of a people who would obey the divine will and observe all religious ceremonies. In modern theological terms we see in the *Aeneid* the doctrine of predestination in its hardest form. Paradoxically, human will is controlled by the will of the gods.

It is significant, and largely in keeping with the narrative method of the *Aeneid*, that a religious element pervades the entire poem like an atmosphere, purifying it, and making it luminous with the light

¹¹⁸ Mackie, 57.

of a higher region. For lack of a better term, I call this the element of religious faith or hope, personal to Virgil and yet catholic in its significance, and in harmony with the convictions of religious people of the Augustan Age. This is why Aeneas cannot be missing from the Augustan Altar of Peace and other Augustan-inspired altars in Italy and the provinces.¹¹⁹ Aeneas is represented not primarily because of his *pietas*, but because his presence served to underline the emperor's special association with the gods.¹²⁰ We can safely say that the national destiny and some portions of the destiny of individuals are shaped by an inflexible power. At the same time, their relation to human beings is expressed by the word *pietas*, which expresses man's relation to higher powers. In African traditional religion, these powers are referred to as gods, the avengers of wrong, as well as rewarders of righteousness.

Aeneas had to undergo suffering before he could enjoy the benefits of his mission. The manner in which Virgil indicates Aeneas's belief in life after death is analogous to the story of Abraham in Genesis 12 to 22. It is a story of *fides*/faith and trust in the divinities. Aeneas fits all the categories of an ancestor in that he lived a worthy life, discovered sacred sites, and died in battle for his native land. However, his successes were not a function of human intellect, but rather of faith and endurance. The thread which gives meaning to the poem and to the whole Roman race is *pietas*. This chapter would be incomplete without a brief discussion of this word, and to that I will now turn.

Pietas: The Etymology of the Concept

Certain concepts are typical of their time, and *pietas* is such a concept. It gained its force of meaning during the period of Augustus when it was used primarily to describe Aeneas as a virtuous hero. In the *Aeneid*, the concept is central throughout the entire work. For the purposes of this book, I am interested in the meaning *pietas* had during the period of transition from the republic to the monarchy. During this period, *pietas* was more of a social concept than a religious or spiritual concept. (I will discuss the term further in chapter four when

¹¹⁹ Galinsky, 9.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 10.

I address the Shona worldview, where piety describes the essence of being human, as expressed in social and corporate terms.)¹²¹

In its Latin setting, *pietas* means dutifulness, dutiful devotion, piety, patriotism, devotion, and kindness.¹²² However, by the time of Augustus, *pietas* was associated with the experience and fate of Aeneas in his escape from Troy to Italy. Aeneas typically expresses the Roman ideal in his religious attitude, in his patriotic mission, and in his relations with his father, son, traditional *Penates*, and his kinsfolk. After the publication of the *Aeneid*, the hero was cast as the pious, dutiful son of Anchises and Venus. In Virgil's work the hero's *pietas* was that "quality for which he was known best and which came to overshadow all his other negative traits."¹²³ This observation will be dealt with further in chapter four, where Abraham will be shown to be an embodiment of *pietas*/faith as well. I propose that *pietas* and *ubuntu* are inseparable in that they both express one's religio-cultural life. In essence, we cannot separate social and spiritual life; the two compliment one another.

In the Shona worldview, *humanitas*, *pietas*, and *fides* are social and religious terms in that they all point to a sense of self-respect within the human arena. *Pietas* is mainly piety towards one's ancestors and, from a religious view, it applies to the veneration of the gods and ancestors. In sum, it is a sense of gratitude expressed in social, cultural, and religious terms. It seems probable that if piety was a socio-religious concept it greatly influenced the way Romans perceived themselves. In Book I, Virgil portrays Aeneas as a figure who believes (1) that everything should be done in a dutiful manner, and (2) that his fame stretches to the heavens; yet he must still wander unknown and destitute.¹²⁴ We must remember that *pietas* did not exist as an independent concept; rather, it functioned within others virtues. Schools

¹²¹ See Michael Gelfund, *The Shona Religion: With Special Reference to the Makore-kore* (Cape Town: Juta and Company Limited, 1962), 51.

¹²² D. P. Simpson, *Cassell's Compact Latin Dictionary* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), 169. See also H. Wagenvoort, "Pietas," in H. S. Versnell, ed., *Studies in Greek and Roman Religion*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), who argued that "of the meaning of the word *pious* and *pietas*, the Romans meant the conduct of the man who performed all his duties towards the deity and his fellow beings fully and in every respect. As *pious* towards the gods, the concept comes very close to *religio*, which gradually replaced it to such an extent that *pietas* came to denote, in a more restricted sense, the fulfillment of duty and virtuous behavior of men to another, and particularly between blood relatives and relations of marriage," 7.

¹²³ Galinsky, 4. This book contains a chapter on Pius Aeneas.

¹²⁴ *Aen.* I.378–9 and I.384.

of thought have said that “the trinity of Roman virtues, *virtus*, *pietas*, *fides*, signified self-discipline and strength of character, respect for the order of things, and honor, good faith, the keeping of agreements.”¹²⁵ In another perspective, “the Romans of the republic seem to have emphasized in *fides* the trustworthiness, loyalty, and sincerity of the person or institution to which they turned, or the objective value of the promise they had received.”¹²⁶ In the program of Roman imperialism, *fides* was a word of basic inequality of which the subjects were to treat rulers as benefactors with immense powers. The cultural, religious, and political atmospheres were saturated with words that would have been hard for Paul to ignore.

Since religion and state were inseparable, *pietas* meant that one was to show devotion to the state—an idea far more complex than what we would call American patriotism. This patriotism involved accepting and supporting the whole social order. The first duty of every citizen was to the group of which he or she was a member. In the Roman religious system, the individual was always subservient; his or her interests were inferior.¹²⁷ No other hero or founder in Roman history is as self-sacrificing as Aeneas. He is not only a hero, but also a pious founder whose personal interests were subdued by divine fate. While no temples were dedicated to Aeneas, Augustus made a point of venerating his ancestor through engravings on monuments of the first and second centuries C.E., which testify to the unprecedented popularity of the Aeneas pious theme during that period.¹²⁸ Aeneas’s piety was not only commemorated on monuments, but emperors paid homage to it by placing Aeneas’s likeness on coins. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil demonstrated through Aeneas that “honor was attained solely by action, not by vague aspiration and piety was achieved by correct performance of one’s obligations.”¹²⁹

¹²⁵ D. M. Field, *Greek and Roman Mythology* (New York: Chartwell Books Inc., 1977), 179. See also Momigliano, *On Pagans*. In the chapter entitled “Religion in Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem,” he states that “*fides* meant the restoration of commercial credit, or as an emotional bond between the living and the dead: perhaps less so between man and gods,” 76–7.

¹²⁶ Momigliano, 77–8.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ See Galinsky, p. 5, who argues that Julius Caesar issued a famous denarius in 48 B.C.E., on which Aeneas is portrayed in a much more vigorous and warlike manner than on the Antonine sestertius.

¹²⁹ Field, 179.

We can therefore say that piety has to do with our humanity and how we treat others. At its deepest level, piety cautions us to respect the universal community of humankind. The gods drove Aeneas to find a city in which people of different races would reside as relatives. It is not by living as we please that we get to know truth and happiness, but by listening to the calling—a calling from the deity to man. Only this piety, this faith within Aeneas, made it possible for him to fulfill the divine mission.¹³⁰ From the above observation, we can say that Roman morality had practically nothing to do with religion. In that regard, Roman religion was merely an emanation of the principle of social order and moral restraint that guided the people in their everyday lives.

Socially and religiously, Aeneas is a model of *pietas*. Throughout Book III, Aeneas is deeply conscious of his pastoral role to his people, and he follows heaven's will and leads people to Italy, trusting only in the divine signals. In Book III, 493–505, we encounter the Trojan hero's deep emotion as he speaks with tears when considering the voyage he and his men were to take. But he reiterates that he is prepared to follow the commandments of divine fate. Aeneas is not the only one singled out for his *pietas*, nor is any particular action associated with this concept. Rather, this characteristic is applied to all known Trojan ancestors of the Romans, and Trojan descent per se is equated with *pietas*.¹³¹

The next question to be investigated is how the Julian family appropriated *pietas* as an ideal Roman principle to ennoble their family. Under Augustan rule, the principle of piety acquired immense political significance. It is interesting to see how piety was used to provide a moral justification for the Roman policy of conquest, and also to provide the philosophical ideological background and sanction for Augustus's principate. By "the second century C.E., the Trojan genealogy had ceased being the prerogative of the imperial family and had

¹³⁰ This notion is clearly stated in Homer's *Iliad* (20.307), where Poseidon prophesies that Aeneas and his descendants will rule over the Trojans. In other books of the *Iliad*, Aeneas fights against the Greeks, exhibits marked piety towards gods (20.347), and is himself honored like a god (11.58). Out of this tradition developed the legend of Aeneas's flight from Troy. By Virgil's time, Aeneas's founding of Rome had become a national legend.

¹³¹ This synthesis is given poignancy by Galinsky, whose book *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* contains a chapter on Pius Aeneas.

become the common property of the entire Roman people.”¹³² In this period, *pietas* gained its spiritual and religious significance because Roman rulers “placed the emphasis on their spiritual inheritance from Aeneas, and Aeneas was presented as the legendary model of the emperor.”¹³³

To be endowed as an Emperor meant that one was the ideal statesman destined to have a major role in the ideal government; it was the citizen who would compel everyone, with the force of his authority and with legal punishments, to do what the philosophers could persuade only a few individuals to do. The Emperor was the man with *pietas*. Aeneas’s *pietas* prefigured the piety of Augustus, a man destined to revive the religious world view of the Roman people.¹³⁴ The principle was greatly promulgated among both Greeks and Romans, and as such the inhabitants were to pride themselves on their sense of justice and later on their humanity. Particularly, their conquest of other nations was to be based on *pietas*. Paul Zanker put it well when he said that “*pietas* was more than just one of the virtues of the princes recorded on the honorary shield. It was to become one of the most important leitmotifs of the Augustan era.”¹³⁵ In a word, *pietas* was engraved on the Augustan shield and was an image of great emotional power, one which profoundly impacted Augustus.

It is intriguing to see how, after the period of Aeneas, *pietas* became the device of the new Roman state—a symbol of ideological power. This *pietas* appeared widely in literature and art, a phenomenon which clearly shows to what extent the dogma had become the common property of all the Roman elite. As will be shown in the following chapters, Paul incorporated this concept to mean *pistis* and the righteousness of God. For now it suffices to say that words carry both religious and political power and these words can be used to subdue other nations. The way in which Augustus affected this development with his reform of the cult of Aeneas will be dealt with below. What we must emphasize now is that when the senate decreed that a golden shield with an inscription should be placed in the Curia Julia in Augustus’s honor, that happened as he himself reports in the *Res Gestae*. The senate did

¹³² Ibid., 6.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Zanker, “The Augustan Program of Cultural Renewal,” in *The Power of Images*, 102.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 102–3.

this to honor Augustus's virtue, tolerance, righteousness, and piety. There is no better source for getting to know the aspirations of the *princeps* than the literature which Augustus inspired. At our disposal we have Virgil who throughout Books I through XII venerates the piety of Aeneas at the request of Augustus himself. It is fascinating to note how Virgil emphasizes the piety of Aeneas; he even has Aeneas say of himself, *sum pius Aeneas* (I am the pious Aeneas).¹³⁶ Here we are confronted with complete certainty how, from start to finish, Virgil had the same ideal before his eyes as the one cherished by Augustus.

In Book IV, we are struck by the character of Aeneas who, after yielding to his love for Dido and basking at length in the luxury the queen offered him, suddenly changed his mind when the goddess warned him to remember his calling and, without letting himself be moved by Dido's touching laments and pleas, rapidly prepared to leave. In this tragic conflict we see depicted a clash between self-interest and divine calling. Aeneas is a hero because he sacrifices his own desires for the formidable task of seeking a new land for the fugitives from Troy for whom a glorious future awaits. Even Queen Dido in her unhappy state is a witness to Aeneas's piety. As she watches Aeneas sail away, she calls out: "Behold, that is the honor and faith of him of whom they say that he carries with him the home-gods of his fathers and that he took his old and decrepit father on his shoulders."¹³⁷

Two points are crucial for this book. First, the queen bases her lament on Aeneas's piety, which she does not fully understand. Second, as she laments, she curses Aeneas and cries prophetically that an avenger of Carthaginian blood will arise to complete the deserved punishment in a bitter war against Aeneas's descendants.¹³⁸ This surely should take our attention to the war with Hannibal and the Punic Wars, which occurred as a result of Aeneas's piety. Deprived of poetic symbolism, the wars were a necessary consequence of Rome's obedience to the divine calling.

Without pushing this further we can conclude that Rome's greatness and world conquest were the fruits of Aeneas's piety and this is also illustrated in the theme of Livy's ambitious work of history. I will

¹³⁶ *Aen.* I.378.

¹³⁷ *Aen.* IV.597–600.

¹³⁸ *Aen.* IV.625–70. This part of the poem presents a prophetic curse, foretelling that Aeneas's descendants will have to fight wars as a result of his abandonment of Queen Dido.

not attempt to go into the details of Livy at this point, but we should mention that Livy was a friend of Augustus; he too began his work shortly after the transition from the republic to the monarchy.

Having delineated the path that Aeneas's *pietas* took, we can conclude that the concept began as a Trojan seed cultivated in both Greek and Roman soil, and if we wish to characterize it with names, we must mention the Julian line. Aeneas, in this sense becomes not just a hero, but a king, founder, and ancestor of both Greeks and Romans. *Pietas* is a concept which is inseparable from the names of Aeneas and Augustus. In Aeneas, Greek wisdom and Roman energy collaborated and aspired toward the ideal commonality of mankind for generations. In the period when Paul wrote, this concept went through rapid innovations. After Augustus, Emperor Tiberius made *pietas* into a goddess, but this still did not mean much to the people. Consequently, under Tiberius, the ethics of Christianity were summarized as "love of God and neighbor." This was piety and humanity combined. It seems clear that Paul developed this concept further in his exposition of the gospel to the Roman world. We will turn to this shortly, but next we will examine how Augustus developed the piety of Aeneas into a cult form.

Indigenization and Dissemination of the Aeneas Cult

The dissemination of Aeneas into cultic veneration cannot be discussed apart from the genealogy¹³⁹ of the Julian-Claudian dynasty. As in other tribal cultures of the ancient world, genealogical foundations claimed pride of place, and consequently were regarded as the source of power. In both Hellenistic and Jewish cultures, genealogy played an important role in the life and thought processes of people. In the tribal cultures of antiquity, family ties were strong. During periods of war, old tribal ties continued to be important despite colonial efforts to disrupt them. In the case of the Julio-Claudian family, kinship was a major organizational principle, and for this reason genealogies which used the idiom of kinship became an important means of expressing all sorts of social, political, ideological, and religious relationships.

¹³⁹ 'Genealogy' in this book refers to the records of a person's or group's descent from an ancestor or ancestors.

Within the Julio-Claudian family, genealogies were probably used for a variety of purposes. An analogy can be drawn from the Shona culture where genealogical relationships are crucial in maintaining cultural and political life because they are the basis for regulating social interaction, marriage, and inheritance, along with other political obligations. If a genealogy can be used to relate members of an actual family, then it can also be used to express the political relationships between families that are not actually related to one another. This can be done simply through the creation of a common ancestor, who is considered the parent of all people living in the society. Taken in this sense, the whole political system can be conceived as one large family and described by using the idiom of genealogy. In the same manner, social, economic, political and religious status relationships are also expressed in genealogical terms. Even cultic positions are constructed along genealogical lines. Patron/client relationships and the language of benefactors are a culmination of genealogy, ideological power, and control. It is here where we need to investigate Augustus Caesar's development of the Aeneas cult. In essence, Augustus consolidated his power by claiming descent from Aeneas.

Genealogically, Augustus claimed his monolithic stature by popularizing the Aeneas legend into a cult. The development of the Aeneas cult can be seen in the language, coins, and images that Augustus put forth in his ideological propaganda. The Julio-Claudian genealogy has been discussed in relation to the "continuously evolving tradition of the Roman imperial ideology,"¹⁴⁰ and was attached to the singular role played by Aeneas. In his religious and political reforms, Augustus made a point of establishing the uninterrupted continuity that, over two millennia, linked the first emperor of Rome to the last through the Trojan ancestry. In the *Aeneid*, we are confronted with Aeneas as the new Augustus. The spiritual inheritance from Aeneas was perceived as the legendary model of the emperor. In other words, the piety of Aeneas was greatly emphasized and promulgated among all the Roman people. The emperor established this inextricable bond between himself and the state religion in order to yoke self-reverting veneration to religious practices that were geared to ancestor worship.

¹⁴⁰ Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 67.

We learn from Galinsky that Augustus built an altar dedicated to Aeneas, and on this altar he installed the portrait of the emperor. The relief on the altar represents the group of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius.¹⁴¹ The legend again indicates that it is not primarily the pietas of Aeneas that is extolled here; the program of the coin is the *Pietas AUGUSTI*.¹⁴² Augustus developed the cult of Aeneas in an indirect way so as to promulgate the ideology of imperial rule. In sum, he made the Caesar family into a godly family. The coin system Augustus developed was basically used "as an allusion to the cult of Divus Augustus and thus expresses Galba's desire to legitimize his reign."¹⁴³ Augustus, who imposed unity on the empire by restoring the most ancient religious traditions, defined the concept of piety along ancestral lines when he established an imperial cult for the worship of the Julio-Claudian *gens*.

In erecting a temple to the divine Julius Caesar, Augustus followed the model of Aeneas, who makes a sacrifice and vows to construct a temple to his father Anchises. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil created an imaginary temple to Augustus, who "shall possess the shrine, and he adorned it with Jove's Trojan progeny with statues that breathe of the seed of Assaracus and the great names of the race sprung from Jove."¹⁴⁴ Linked by kinship to the Trojan Penates, to Vesta, and even to Apollo, all of whom he ministered to as *Pontifex Maximus*, Augustus sacrificed to the ancestral cult, while as emperor he basked in the worship that devolved from these associations.¹⁴⁵ With the institution of ancestral cult, Augustus becomes both a priest and a political figure. In this case, religion was embedded in the political structure of the state and, consequently, ancestral cult worship developed into an official religion.¹⁴⁶

Further evidence of the dissemination of the Aeneas cult can be seen in the institution of coin issues that was so central in the Greco-Roman empire. A good example is a denarius issued during the reign of Augustus at Segesta; on each side was minted the figure of Aeneas

¹⁴¹ Galinsky, 7.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ *Aen.* V.62.

¹⁴⁵ Tanner, 68.

¹⁴⁶ See Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, eds., *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 163–77.

carrying his father, Anchises.¹⁴⁷ Another distinctive example is a “sestertius issued during the reign of Antonius Pius.”¹⁴⁸ Its reverse shows Aeneas carrying Anchises who, *capite veletto*, holds the *cista sacra* with the Penates in his lap. This was the famous denarius issued by Julius Caesar in 48 B.C.E.¹⁴⁹ On this coin, Aeneas does not wear armor; rather, he is portrayed in a much more vigorous and warlike manner than on the Antonian sestertius. The representation of Aeneas as a nude warrior follows the Greek tradition and is further evidence of Caesar’s preference for Greek models—a preference known especially from the architecture he commissioned. This should remind us of the distinctive culture of the Greeks which Augustus appropriated in his consolidation of Greeks and Romans. Again, the cult of Aeneas functions as a symbol of reconciliation between Greeks and Romans.

Interestingly, on the coin, Aeneas does not lead his son but instead carries the Palladium, which is a more martial emblem of Troy’s survival than the sacred chest with the peaceful household gods. Like all the Julii, Caesar claimed to have descended from Aeneas and Venus, and emphasizing this Trojan descent is likely the primary reason the coin was issued, especially since the head of Venus appears on the obverse.¹⁵⁰ Related to this issue of coins is the propagation of imperial propaganda, because “good news would be printed on the local coins.”¹⁵¹ A similar situation exists today, where the whole world uses American currency in business transactions. For Augustus, the imperial cult was a way of subduing the whole world, and conquered nations served by Rome’s effective techniques of mass production and standardization would pay homage to the emperor.

Months in the Roman world were named after heroes and ancestors, another way in which imperial propaganda was reinforced. Although no month was named after Aeneas, we do have Sextilis made August and Quintilius made July. The Greco-Roman world is popularly known for games and most of these games were to honor great benefactors,

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandry, and Pere Pau Ripolles, eds., *Roman Provincial Coinage: From the Death of Caesar to the Death of Vitellius (44 BC–AD 69)*, vol. 1 (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 173. See also vol. 2, plates 652 and 2306, where Aeneas has his father on his shoulders.

¹⁴⁸ Galinsky, 4–5.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Ramsay MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 14.

sometimes kings, and occasionally Roman commanders who had led successful war expeditions. In sum, the Aeneas cult culminated into Augustus's political administration of the empire. The offering of the cult of Caesar should be perceived as a novelty on the part of Augustus. Much scholarship has been produced on the cult of the Caesars and does not concern us here. However, all the attendant rituals and beliefs that were developed along traditional lines led to the worship of the imperial family. In sum, all was due to Augustus's power in reforming and bringing Rome to its Golden rule. It is a story of founding ancestors which is at the root of Paul's letter to the Romans. Paradoxically, New Testament scholars remain politically conservative as to the context in which Paul wrote Romans.

This section will be incomplete without a brief discussion of the propaganda of the Julio-Claudian family, which in a sense is a continuation of the Aeneas cult. Augustus used religion as an instrument of control. In one year alone, he repaired 82 temples, and in these temples he laid images of Aeneas. The Forum and the Campus Martius were meant to demonstrate the extent of Augustus's aim.¹⁵² The Forum was probably a place where all Roman past traditions were kept. In another sense, it was the tomb of the Roman forefathers. This sense of a magical presence of the past, oozing out of each stone, and demanding hallowed reverence from the present, was not an embarrassment to Augustus.¹⁵³ He was passionate about leading the Romans to recover the forgotten values, traditions, and rites of the past.¹⁵⁴ Paradoxically, he made the Forum into a museum of the past and also converted it into a massive shrine for the Julian-Claudian family. Thus, the forum became the center of the world, with the Julian family as the benefactors of all nations. The Forum embodied the values of a new society, for which the central reference point was no longer the past, but the emperor himself.

All the provincial decrees erected in the Julian-Claudian family's honor were meant to register for posterity the gratitude of their conquered beneficiaries. Augustus proved himself to be the benefactor of

¹⁵² The meaning of these two places has been well described by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill who argues that "the two areas offered very different challenges, and so illustrate different aspects of his aims: the Forum the historical heart of the city, full of precious relics of the past, the Campus Martius a green field site within a stone's throw of the center..." 50.

¹⁵³ Wallace-Hadrill, 51.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

the Roman Empire, a fact heavily contested by Paul in Romans. In this sense, the honorary inscriptions demonstrate the extent to which the Julio-Claudian family had outstripped other nations in a unilateral display of power. We have a clear document in which Augustus assumes eschatological status within the sweep of the republican tradition. First, the Forum of Augustus is a clear display of power and majesty, a power unparalleled in the world at that time. The portrait statue programme at the Forum of Augustus represents Augustus's official rendering of his place in world history and his new formulation of the heroic ideal. Moreover, it accords supreme status to Augustus within the Roman eulogistic tradition and, intriguingly, in particular cases, renders honor to dishonored benefactors. We need to consider what these honorific inscriptions reveal about the culture of imperial beneficence from Augustus to other succeeding emperors.

Second and most distinctive of all is the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (The Achievements of Divine Augustus), written by Augustus to be read in the senate after his death on August 19, 14 C.E.¹⁵⁵ The *Res Gestae* was inscribed on the bronze tablets attached to the pillars of his mausoleum in the Campus Martias next to Tiber. The copy was also chiseled upon the walls of the Temple of Rome and Augustus at Ancyra in Asia Minor, the modern Ankara.¹⁵⁶ Not only that, but the *Res Gestae* text was also erected in the provinces.¹⁵⁷ The central part of the *Res Gestae* is devoted to the vast array of benefactions that secured Augustus's *auctoritas* as the pre-eminent Roman magistrate among other Roman magistrates.¹⁵⁸ The appendix, which summarizes Augustus's expenses on public projects, was not written by Augustus but possibly by one of his admirers. One wonders what impression Augustus meant to convey in the *Res Gestae*. The answer is found in Augustus's effort to be the triumphant emperor of the world. The ascendancy of his *auctoritas* before the senate and the people is summed up in the golden shield honoring his "courage, clemency, justice and piety" in the Curia Julii

¹⁵⁵ P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, eds., *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Res Gestae*, 332.

¹⁵⁷ The four extant remains of the *Res Gestae* are found in Galatia: Greek and Latin texts at Ancyra, and fragments of the Greek and Latin text at Apollonia in Pisidia and Antioch in Pisidia. Did Paul see the inscribed *Res Gestae* texts during his travels through South Galatia and possibly North Galatia? (Acts 13:13ff, 16:6, 18:23).

¹⁵⁸ *Res Gestae* 15–24 lists Augustus's military achievements by which the world was subjugated to Rome.

which flows as much from the moral honorifics traditionally attributed to benefactors in the Greco-Roman honor system as from military ascendancy.¹⁵⁹

I see the *Res Gestae* as the culmination of everything about Aeneas's journey from Troy to Italy. As a religious and political document, it establishes Augustus as a kind of superpatron who expanded the traditional boundaries of ancestor patronage from local communities to the Roman community as a whole. The public lauded Augustus as the iconic figure of imperial virtue, and he was celebrated in the *forum Augustum* as the culmination of Aeneas's fate-ordained history. He became the new Aeneas destined to exercise imperial rule throughout the world. Dieter Georgi noted that "the gospel according to Augustus had the world spellbound,"¹⁶⁰ including presumably some of the Roman Christians to whom Paul later wrote. My contention is that from the first century B.C.E., as the Julian house eclipsed its rivals, *pistis*/faith was monopolized by the Caesars. The onesidedness of this contest struck cross-cultural readers as the turning point in Roman history and was reflected in the Augustan propaganda throughout the provinces. We have Germanicus who later described Augustus as "the true savior and benefactor of the entire race of humanity."¹⁶¹ Thus the iconic status of Augustus as a divine emperor was deeply entrenched in the propaganda of his contemporaries, including Paul.

The Augustan eschatological traditions and ancestor worship were most likely known throughout Paul's missionary areas. Paul himself had extensively traveled throughout the Greek East, and was aware of the *Res Gestae*. It was well known that Augustus had sponsored an official eschatology through the construction of a new Forum. The imperial ideology laid heavy emphasis on the pre-eminent merit of Augustus as the savior of the world.¹⁶² As a new Aeneas, Augustus

¹⁵⁹ On the moral stature of the benefactor in antiquity, see F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St Louis, MO: Clayton Publishing House, 1982).

¹⁶⁰ Dieter Georgi, "Who is the True Prophet?" *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (Harvard University Press, 1986): 1–3. See also Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 295–8.

¹⁶¹ R. K. Sherk, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 18–9.

¹⁶² The inscription on the golden shield placed in the Curia Julia recognized Augustus's valor (ἀρετή), clemency (ἐπείκεια), justice (δικαιοσύνη), and piety (εὐσέβεια). *Res Gestae* 34.

had established peace, inaugurated an era of unparalleled beneficence, and secured hope for the future.¹⁶³ In a further act of grace, we hear of Augustus's clemency towards his enemies.¹⁶⁴ His principate represents the culmination of Providence in the universal history of mankind.

The superiority of Augustus as world benefactor for all time is reinforced by the language of excess. The imperial propaganda ascribed a cosmic status to Augustus. The reason was completely obvious to all. He had brought about a most decisive reversal to the social, political, and religious disintegration that had occurred as a result of civil war. When Roman civilization had tottered on the precipice, Augustus had offered a new beginning that would bring real life and an end to all regret. The court poet Horace (65–8 B.C.E.) affords us insight into the profound sense of relief that Augustus brought to a generation wearied by war-guilt and the snubbing of traditional Roman values. Horace's idyllic description of the great fertility of the Augustan Age is replete with the motifs of redemption and the restoration of the *mos maiorum*:

The country yearns for Caesar. For when he is here, the ox in safety roams the pastures; Ceres and benign prosperity make rich crops; safe are the seas over which our sailors course; faith shrinks from blame; polluted by no stain, the home is pure; custom and law have stamped out the taint of sin; mothers win praise because of children like unto sires; while vengeance follows close on guilt.¹⁶⁵

This widespread thankfulness for the idyllic Augustan peace is confirmed by the festival calendar of an Italian temple of Augustus. The prayer entry for the 30th of January states:

On this day the Altar of Peace was dedicated. Prayer to the Dominion of Caesar Augustus, the Protector of the Roman citizens and of the world.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ For the imperial ideology of peace, see Augustus, *Res Gestae* 12 (Εἰρήνης Σεβάσσης), 13 (εἰρηνευομένης), and 26 (εἰρηνεύεσθαι). In 34, Augustus stated: "I extinguished the flames of war," thus making himself the peacemaker of the world.

¹⁶⁴ *Res Gestae* 3 and 34 B.C.E., where Augustus stated: "When victorious I spared all citizens who sued for pardon."

¹⁶⁵ Horace, *Carm.* 4.5.16–24. See also A. Wallace-Hadrill, "The Golden Age and Sin in Augustan Ideology," *P&P* 95 (1982): 19–36. For Augustus stated faithfulness to the *mos maiorum*, see *Res Gestae* 5, 8.

¹⁶⁶ CIL (X) 8375: C.E. 4–14.

The poignancy of this saying is that Augustus is a new Aeneas, who embodies the quintessential Roman values.¹⁶⁷

Pauline exegesis should take into account the Forum of Augustus and its contribution to our understanding of the spread of the Aeneas cult. More important for our purposes is the design of the Forum and the ideological purposes served by the portrait statue programme. Each line of republican and Julian luminaries radiated from a different founding hero of Rome.¹⁶⁸ About the Forum Roman poets have said, “on the one side one sees Aeneas laden with his precious burden, and so many members of the Julian nobility. On the other side one sees Ilia’s son Romulus on his shoulder the arms of the conquered general and the splendid records of action inscribed beneath the statues of the men arranged in order.”¹⁶⁹ By exalting founding heroes, Augustus defined exemplary virtue for future generations. Roman history, therefore, had found its eschatological culmination in Augustus and he provided the yardstick of *virtus* (virtue) for all future rulers of Rome.

Not surprisingly, then, the Forum became one of the hallowed viewing places for Augustus’s civic and military honors. In his own words, Augustus wrote that, “during my consulship the senate and equestrian order and people of Rome unanimously saluted me father of my country and voted that this should be inscribed in the vestibule of my house, in the Julian senate house and in the Augustan forum beneath the chariot which had been set up in my honor by ruling the senate.”¹⁷⁰ What we have in the forum of Augustus is basically a eulogy of founding fathers and the achievements of Augustus himself. In this regard, one might imagine the scenario where Roman believers strolled around

¹⁶⁷ See the excellent discussion by Dieter Georgi, “Aeneas and Abraham: Paul under the aspect of the Latin culture,” (January 5, 2002), 115–7; H. Koester, “Memory of Jesus’ Death and the Worship of the Risen Lord,” *HTR* 91/4 (1998): 335–50. The *Ara Pacis* (Altar of Peace), erected in the Campus Martius between 13 and 9 B.C.E. to celebrate Augustus from Gaul, includes a representation of Aeneas arriving in Italy.

¹⁶⁸ For a full list of the republican princes, see E. A. Judge, “The Eulogistic Inscriptions of the Augustan Forum,” *Journal of Graeco-Roman Studies* 123 (1987): 96–7.

¹⁶⁹ *Cassius Dio*. 56.34.2; *Pliny*, NH. 22.7.13; *Aul.Noc. Att.*, 10.11.10. See also Paul Zanker, who comments that “in the Forum of Augustus, in the central niches of the two large exedrae, Aeneas and Romulus stood as counterparts of Mars and Venus... Venus’s grandson was depicted fleeing from Troy in flames, the son of Mars as *triumphator*. The juxtaposition was not intended to measure the two heroes against one another, but to celebrate their deeds as the embodiments of two complimentary virtues,” 201.

¹⁷⁰ *Res Gestae* 35.1. See also *Res Gestae* 8.5: “I myself left standards in many matters for the imitation of posterity.”

the Forum *Augustum* studying the statues and their *elogia*, pondering their fulfillment in the *Res Gestae* at Augustus's mausoleum, and discussing why Paul's message of Abraham was infinitely superior to Augustus and his founding fathers. In the statue inscriptions the piety of the republican *principes*—a feature of his rule to which Augustus regularly draws attention (*Res Gestae* 7.3, 9–12, 24, 29.2)—is demonstrated by their commitment to the traditional cults in times of crisis. In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus underlines his superiority to the princes of the *fori Augusti* through his telling references to the vestal virgins and the auspices. Unlike Aeneas, Augustus assumed a position of religious and political power in the state's cult.

In sum, Augustus raised the Aeneas cult to a political level. Although pressed by the people and the senate, Augustus refused the dictatorship twice in 22 B.C.E., having already laid aside his consular powers in 23 B.C.E., and having been compensated for the loss of imperium with tribunician power.¹⁷¹ Indeed, it was the senate, equestrian order, and the people of Rome who pressed upon Augustus the title of "Father of my Country," inscribing it below the chariot honoring him in the Forum *Augustum*. From this we can infer that Augustus's intention was to demonstrate how he acquired imperium on the basis of *auctoritas* and not on the basis of official rank.

How did Paul and his audience respond to his presentation of Abraham and then to the manner in which Roman political ideology presented Augustus Caesar and Rome's founding ancestors? We will answer this in due course. Currently, we must stress that Roman audiences would have noticed a terminological overlap between Paul's proclamation of the gospel and the inscriptional propaganda of Augustus and his successors. Roman auditors must have realized that Paul was creatively advocating for a new ancestor whose benefits surpassed the imperial house. The response of Roman audiences, initially at least, was probably determined by the extent of their commitment as clients to their imperial patron. At a more conceptual level, both eschatological traditions had similarities that may have provoked the interest of Roman auditors. Just as fate had determined that humanity would be blessed through Caesar's birth, so Christ had died "at the right time" (κατὰ κáιρón), establishing the reign of grace. Second, Paul's Roman

¹⁷¹ *Res Gestae* 5.1, 10.1, 35; *Dio* 54.1; *Suetonius*, Aug. 52.

auditors would have observed that Paul's unilateral understanding of ancestors in Romans 4 captured an important emphasis of the imperial propaganda: that no one could compete against the immortal grace of an Augustus or his heirs. Readers of Romans would surely have seen that a similar process of reversal had occurred in Christ's ministry and, consequently, this was Paul's message. God had intervened to reverse the dishonor of the cross by crowning his Son with eschatological honor. The obedience of the incarnate Son of David was vindicated by his resurrection from the dead and by his heavenly installment as "Son of God in power" (Rom. 1:4; 4:24–25; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11, 34).¹⁷² In so doing, God had declared that Abraham was the true father of believers and that his fatherhood resided not in the Roman commonwealth (as was the case with Augustus) but in the entirety of humanity (Rom. 4:16–9).¹⁷³

Conclusion

We have sought to demonstrate that without Aeneas, the imperial propaganda of Augustus would have lost its power. In Dionysius and Virgil we see that the Trojan connection helped to create a powerful pedigree for the Julian family and consequently for all the successors of Augustus. Political and cultural motives combined to develop a narrative that would bring mutual esteem to Romans and Latins and establish a pedigree that connected Rome to the Hellenic world.¹⁷⁴ Both writers of the Augustan Age reshaped the story for the needs of their time to mean reconciliation and friendship between Greeks and Trojans. The cult of Aeneas, which Augustus transformed into an emperor cult, helped Paul to creatively advance his gospel using the language and culture of the day. The terminological and conceptual overlaps between the imperial and Pauline gospels ensured that elements of Paul's message would have attracted or repulsed Greeks

¹⁷² T. H. Kim, "The Anarthrous υἱός θεοῦ in Mark 15:39 and the Roman Imperial Cult," *Biblica* 79/2 (1998): 221–41.

¹⁷³ For discussions of "Father" in its imperial context, see E. M. Lasson, "The Use of the Father Image in Imperial Propaganda and 1 Corinthians 4:14–21," *Tyn Bul* 42/1 (1991): 127–36, and T. R. Stevenson, "The Ideal Benefactor and the Father Analogy in Greek and Roman Thought," *CQ* 42/2 (1992): 421–36.

¹⁷⁴ Gruen, 50.

and Romans. Both Greeks and Romans had known about the legendary stories of founding ancestors, and so the ancestral terminology in Romans 4 found a ready prepared soil among Paul's audience. The next chapter will investigate the portrayal and reception of Abraham in the Greco-Roman world.

CHAPTER TWO

ABRAHAM IN HELLENISTIC-JEWISH CONTEXT

In the first chapter we addressed a number of issues pertaining to the construction of Aeneas as an ancestor of the Greeks and Romans, particularly as the ancestor of the Julian-Claudian family. I also showed how political and cultural motives were combined to develop an ancestor who would provide a powerful pedigree in reconciling Greeks and Romans.¹ The section on the indigenization of the Aeneas cult demonstrates that religion is “embedded”² in social and political institutions, which we call Imperial rule and emperor cult.³ As was shown, Aeneas was transformed into a social, religious, cultural, and political construct for both Greeks and Romans. Thus, the role of ancestors in a nation’s beginnings is too well entrenched to be discarded or ignored. Likewise, Hellenistic Jews did not shy away from their founding ancestor, Abraham, whom they lauded as a consummate example of rectitude. His piety embraced biblical precepts and encompassed Greek philosophy; he was a pre-eminent hero whose special gifts held great appeal to both Greeks and Romans. In our reading of Philo and Josephus, we see a heightened sense of self-awareness and how this inspired them to reshape and refashion Jewish traditions within the Greco-Roman world of the Augustan Age.

In this chapter, we will accomplish three things. First, we will define Hellenistic Judaism as it existed in the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural encounter of the two cultures. Second, we will look at how the encounter contributed to a shift in ancestral Jewish practices and faith. Here the investigation will focus on Abraham as an ancestor within the world of Hellenistic Judaism; we will move chronologically

¹ See “The Making of the Trojan Legend,” in Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republic Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 6–51.

² Wolfgang Stegemann, “The Emergence of God’s New People: The Beginnings of Christianity Reconsidered,” in *Annali di storia dell’ esegesi 21/2: COME È NATO IL CRISTIANESIMO?* (EDIZIONI DEHONIANE BOLOGNA: EDB, 2004), 507–8.

³ N. T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 168.

through literature from Hellenistic Jewish writers, Intertestamental documents, and the works of Philo and Josephus. This chapter will address the basis on which Abraham, an ancestor of a despised people, became a spiritual ancestor of all nations. I will also develop a brief, postcolonial reading of Josephus, followed by a comparison of Aeneas and Abraham.

Definition of Hellenistic Judaism

The terms *Ioudaismos* and *Hellenismos* occur for the first time in Jewish and deuterocanonical literature in 2 Maccabees 1:1.⁴ The same book records the first known occurrence of “Hellenization” or *Hellenismos* with the meaning of Greek culture in this same body of sacred texts. Before defining the term, we must remind readers that the coming together of these two cultures has been over-exaggerated by scholars who view Hellenism as an erosion of Jewish cultural and religious practices. While we cannot deny that Hellenism was a powerful force, modern scholars need to view the encounter as both a synthesis⁵ and a fusion⁶ of cultures.

Both cultures were first and foremost ways of life (or what Josephus refers to as the *πολιτεία*, meaning a public way of life). As ways of life, neither was initially threatening to the other. John Collins asserts that Hellenistic culture was a manifold entity, and it was neither absorbed nor a rejected whole.⁷ This assertion confirms that scholars over-exaggerate the force of Hellenism when they assume that it eroded everything that was Jewish. Both at home and in Diaspora, the Jewish way of life continued to survive. The rights of Jews (or Judeans) to live according to their ancestral laws had been confirmed by Hellenistic rulers, most famously by Antiochus III when he took control of Jeru-

⁴ Erich S. Gruen, “Fact and Fiction: Jewish Legends in a Hellenistic Context,” in Paul Cartledge, Peter Garnsey, and Erich Gruen, eds., *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 72.

⁵ Martin Hengel, *The Hellenization of Judea in the First Century after Christ* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 2.

⁶ Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture, Fusion and Diffusion* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1959), 5.

⁷ John J. Collins, “Cult and Culture: The Limits of Hellenization in Judea,” in *Hellenism in the Land of Israel*, ed. John J. Collins and Gregory E. Sterling (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 39.

saalem at the beginning of the second century B.C.E.⁸ Hellenism, like Judaism, was a manifold entity, and not all aspects of it were a threat to Jewish culture. What aspects of Judaism survived in the Greek-speaking Diaspora? Answering this question will greatly assist us in understanding Abraham's status in the Hellenistic Jewish context.

We must remember that Jews, whether at home or in Diaspora, never forgot about God or the sacred Torah. The Jewish religion remained a powerful and competing force in the Diaspora.⁹ Religion for both Greek and Jewish cultures was a sensitive area, and all honored each other well. In fact the two cultures found a common ground in creation theology, which posited that the will of God is reflected in nature. Abraham (as we will discover in Josephus's portrayal) was honored as the first to discover that nature is imbued with God's qualities. Aristaeas, in a letter to King Ptolemy, expresses this clearly: "These people [the Jews] worship God the overseer and creator of all, whom all men worship, but we, Oh King, address differently as Zeus and Dis."¹⁰ Zeus was well celebrated in Greek poems and speeches. The God of the Jews was sometimes identified with Dionysus, because the use of branches at the Feast of Sukkoth was associated with the thyrsus in Bacchic festivals.¹¹

Related to the above is the notion of cultic separatism. While some Jews respected Zeus as another name for God, they did not participate in the pagan cult. Scholars have viewed this as a form of anti-social behavior; we view it as a way the Jews respected their traditions amidst foreigners. In both traditions, religion was deeply embedded in culture and politics, and the Jews refused to participate in pagan festivals because of their opposition to idolatry. Yet, "Diaspora Jews embraced Greek philosophy and the concept of a universal wisdom."¹² Modern scholars must remember that there is a difference between

⁸ Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 82–9. The concept of "ancestral laws" is much broader than the Law of Moses, and includes not only the elements of the Jewish religion, but maintenance of political institutions, the form of the regime, and the methods of social organization.

⁹ Martin North, "Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century," in Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak, eds., *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1992), 54.

¹⁰ *Ep. Arist.* 16.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.5.

¹² J. J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2000), 209.

cult and culture, and the Jews were not prepared to assimilate¹³ into the Greek religion. For the Jews, the Torah was to be kept separate, and ancestral practices were to be honored. Thus, Jews had to decide how much Hellenism to accept and how much of their Jewish culture to maintain. They were first confronted with a choice to learn Greek in addition to Hebrew. Thus, Diaspora synagogues were centers of both worship and learning. As in Judea, the gymnasium encompassed foreign features. Some Jews were attracted to this, so much so that “they removed marks of circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant. They participated in the Gentiles’ culture and exposed themselves to the devil.”¹⁴

In colonial countries, education was welcomed especially by the wealthy community. In Jerusalem and in Diaspora, figures like Jason and Menelaus were attracted to some things Hellenistic, and the gymnasium—the great symbol of Hellenistic culture and the forum for Greek education—was embraced by many people in Jerusalem.¹⁵ Likewise, the Greeks could not resist the lure of Judaism. Hellenism’s advantage was in promoting and expanding its economic interest.¹⁶ The fact that authors like Jason of Cyrene and Eupolemus wrote in Greek strongly indicates that Greek education had an impact on Jews both at home and in the Diaspora. An intriguing observation is that in 2 Maccabees we are told that the Jews were obsessed with the novelty of Greek athletics. I concur with Tcherikover that the main motives of Hellenism were basically profit and power. On the contrary, those

¹³ ‘Assimilation’ in this book refers to the degree to which Diaspora Jews were integrated into Greek and Roman culture. Assimilation may be measured by the level of acculturation—that is, how much the Jews adapted to the non-material aspects of Greco-Roman culture in areas such as language, values, and intellectual traditions. Language is, of course, an integral aspect of social relations, but also grants access to the non-material aspects of culture. In acquiring Greek *paideia* or education, upper-class Jews gained access not only to literary resources but also to a system of values which constituted, in Greek eyes, the very essence of civilization. For an elaboration of assimilation and acculturation see John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 B.C.E.–117 C.E.)*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 88–92, 103–19.

¹⁴ 1 Macc. 1:11–15 (NRSV).

¹⁵ Jean Delorme, *Gymnasium* (Paris: Boccard, 1960), 47–8.

¹⁶ This was well stated by Victor Tcherikover who wrote that “the changes in the sphere of religion and culture were not the reason for the reform, but its consequences, and they involved no principles. The reform consisted of converting Jerusalem into a *polis*, primarily with an eye to economic advantage,” 169.

who embraced Hellenistic culture deemed it fit to bring reforms into their cultures.

In all cultures, education tends to redefine how people perceive themselves. Therefore, Hellenistic-Judaism should be viewed as a synthesis of cultural traits from both groups. Hellenistic-Judaism was a blending of cultural and religious elements at various points in the life of both Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism.¹⁷ Intertestamental literature, Philo, Josephus and first-century Christian writings reveal that the new did not drive out the old. The spread of Hellenism did not drive out Judaism; instead, the two creatively and mutually engaged each other. The two existed and moved forward in a creative synthesis in which the native elements were not submerged but continued to be revitalized as each responded to new imperial conditions and influences. Each nation maintained its own religion and political structure. The Jews refused to worship Greek and Roman gods, honor shrines, or participate in cults and so continued to adhere to their own religion.

As postcolonial readers we need to be cautious not to demonize foreign cultures. Greek culture was surely a powerful force among both Jews and Romans, but the encounter was a major turning point in the history of civilization and religion, for out of the amalgamation emerged what we call Christianity today. Aeneas remained the ideal ancestor among the Julian-Claudian family. Similarly, Abraham was an honored figure in both Palestinian Judaism and Judaism of the Diaspora. The vitality of all these cultures should not be taken for granted, for each one of them held pride of place in religion, culture, and politics.

People are sensitive to the values of their national traditions and will cherish them not only in periods of enlargement like the Augustan or Elizabethan, but even more when the survival of those traditions is threatened and most intensely when nationality is lost. The wistful loyalty evoked by threatened extinction tends to find expression in the examination and glorification of national traditions to an even greater degree than does the proud consciousness of national success. Loyalty to national traditions is therefore strong during periods when a

¹⁷ Lester L. Grabbe, "Hellenism and Judaism," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Judaism in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 53–83. In this chapter, Lester presents evidence of a blending of cultural elements at various points throughout the life of the two cultures. By far the major characteristic was the existence of the old and the new, the Greek and the Oriental, side by side.

great imperial power threatens to erase national, religious, and cultural distinction and impose its own culture.¹⁸ This framework will greatly assist us in our attempt to define Hellenistic Judaism.

Earlier scholars argued for a major distinction between Palestinian Judaism and Hellenistic Judaism. While this contrasting polarity seems to hold power, it also undermines the power of Jewish culture. No doubt the Jewish culture of the day faced the choice to either assimilate or resist; however, Hellenism also had to engage with the symbolic identity of the Jews which was grounded in the story of their heroic past. As Martin Hengel observed, by the middle to the end of the third century B.C.E. (i.e., before the period of Paul's writing) Palestinian Judaism became thoroughly Hellenized as did Judaism in the Diaspora.¹⁹ Therefore, we can define Hellenism as the spread and "blending"²⁰ of Greek culture among Jews and countries of the Mediterranean world. We learn from Cato that "the encounter with Hellenism was itself a critical ingredient in the shaping of Roman values."²¹ Cato gained appreciation of the language and education of the Greeks at a time when his nation was groping to define its relationship to that older and far more celebrated civilization.²² As a prominent figure in the Roman world, Cato undertook a lifelong campaign not to repress Greek culture but to employ it as a means to mark off the distinctiveness of the Roman character.

Cato's familiarity with Hellenism, far from paradoxical or problematic, formed an integral part of his cultural strategy. In essence, Roman culture was best asserted by a man who commanded Greek language and literature. Greek education helped Romans to gain a sense of pride in world politics. Cato the Elder could boast of accomplishments in a remarkable variety of spheres—public and private, military, political, and literary—but none perhaps more important than his contribution to the self-consciousness of a Roman national character. Here we have another cultural blending to help us understand Hellenistic Judaism.

¹⁸ In the case of Hellenism, the Jews knew that, the merits of Greece aside, the foreign culture was the ruling power; Jewish ancestral beliefs needed to be elevated to counter this power.

¹⁹ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in the Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 104–5.

²⁰ Gregory E. Sterling and John J. Collins, eds., *Hellenism in the Land of Israel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 1.

²¹ Gruen, *Culture and National Identity*, 64 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

²² *Ibid.*, 81.

The Jews had a similar appreciation of the Greek culture but with a different experience. For the Jews, this culture was an instrument of three successive empires to which they fell—the Ptolemaic, the Seleucid, and lastly the Roman.²³ No doubt the Jews in and around Palestine were well aware of the influence of Greek culture.²⁴ We should note that the Jews had their own way of life which was governed by religious and political principles. The Temple and priesthood governed the shape of Jewish life, rural as well as urban.²⁵ Their reaction to foreign rule was political and religious, so they had successive resistance movements to accentuate their uniqueness and, in the realm of the spirit, to systematize their own religious tradition through the work of the rabbinic class.²⁶ At the center of the encounter are two main issues, namely identity and cultural traditions. Identities and traditions are social constructions whose function is to draw lines of separation between races. In an elaboration of this basic assertion, cultures are expressions of symbolic identity, and relational and shifting context. For such interpretations, ethnic boundaries become attitudinal and significant symbols—crucial objects of study.

We now turn our attention to the symbolic aspects of the engagement between Judaism and Hellenism and to the subjective meaning of this engagement. We might ask how much traditional beliefs and practices were threatened by this encounter. Most likely, group memories were provoked. The Jews we know for certain were diametrically opposed to what Greeks stood for in religion, culture, and politics.²⁷ In these cases, tension was often accompanied by ideological conflict, and this probably left a lasting mark which fueled Jewish revolts during the Maccabean period (first century B.C.E.). The Maccabean revolts resulted when Greek lifestyle was promoted in Jerusalem by the high priest Jason and his supplanter, Menelaus, with backing from the Seleucid-Greek imperial government.

²³ Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2002), 3.

²⁴ This is the greatest achievement of Martin Hengel who demonstrated that both Palestinian and Diaspora Jews experienced the effects of Hellenization.

²⁵ Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue*, 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tessa Rajak, "The Hasmonians and the Uses of Hellenism," in P. R. Davies and R. T. White, eds., *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian History and Literature* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 265.

By the late Second Temple period, symbolic opposition to Hellenism was motivated by the Jewish notion of constructing and preserving their identity. It was helpful, and ultimately indeed creative, for the Jews to see the Greeks as different from themselves in particular respects. We naturally find reflections of the symbols of those identities, revealing to us that Jewish and Greek distinctions were commonplace in Second Temple Jewish societies. To Paul this was a primary division in society and well stressed in Romans 1:16. This dichotomy is central to our study of Abraham as an ancestor of both Jews and Gentiles in Pauline theology. However, this distinction is strong among people who claim different ancestors, and it comes so natural that Paul claims that faith, along with other differences between races and nations, bridges the gap between Greek and Jew.²⁸ In this case, symbolic boundaries become flexible, and nations can dialogue on an equal basis; the essence and value of each nation is preserved.

The Jews' pride in the precedence of their character, creed, and accomplishments sustained them through the Maccabean period and even in the Diaspora. In other words, their stories/myths sustained them, especially their stories about God. As the Jews adjusted to the Hellenistic world, they did not accommodate the pagan culture but rather reaffirmed their own lustrous legacy.²⁹ The coming of Hellenism to the Palestinian land allowed the indigenous people to retell their traditions and rewrite history to embellish antique traditions and to elevate their place within the recent past. Thus, Hellenistic Judaism should be viewed as a blending of cultures, each laying claim to the traditions of the past. While Hellenization did introduce Greek culture into Palestine, local traditions continued to be strong and vibrant. Greek perspectives and culture were also influenced and reshaped by local traditions. Some locals and especially upper classes within urban areas adopted Hellenism more completely, while others reacted strongly against anything Greek. I contend that most indigenous peoples carried on their native traditions but were open to the influence of Hellenism and sought either to reformulate to a limited extent their native cultures or to express themselves in ways that the dominant

²⁸ See Rom 10:11–2, Gal 3:28, and Col 3:11, where barbarians and Scythians also figure by way of contrast with Greeks.

²⁹ Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 246.

imperial power would understand.³⁰ The mistake scholars have made is to assume that the whole native populous adopted Greek as an official language. On the contrary, native people continued to use Hebrew and Aramaic for expression and communication.

When speaking of Hellenism we must remember that not everything indigenous was altered. The encounter had mutual impact on both cultures. While the native land maintained monotheism, especially in the Second Temple of Jerusalem, Diaspora Judaism found itself in competition with other traditions.³¹ First, the two cultures had no common language. The Greeks were monolingual; the Jews were bilingual (speaking Hebrew and Aramaic) which allowed communication with the Persians, Babylonians, and Egyptians.³² The Jewish culture in Diaspora was therefore rich, well known, and respected.³³ Thus, the Jewish legend was allowed to survive in the terms in which the Greeks and Romans had invented it. Some Jews even felt entitled to seek respectable genealogical connections with the Greeks.³⁴ Someone, either Greek or Jew, invented a common descent of Jews and Spartans from Abraham.³⁵ The Jews were also known to have been friends of the inhabitants of Pergamum in the time of Abraham.³⁶ Indeed, Abraham—more cosmopolitan and less bound to particular symbols of Jewish life than Moses—became the favorite hero of such concoctions. Therefore, the Hellenistic Judaism we are discussing in this book was never one of assimilation or repudiation but one which demanded a respect of both Greek and Jewish traditions.

In the Diaspora, Jews began to express themselves in Greek as early as the third century B.C.E. For example, Eupolemus, a Hellenistic Jewish writer, was a Judean who owed his allegiance to Judas Maccabeus.³⁷ In addition, Theodotus was a Jew who wrote a Greek epic

³⁰ See, for example, Susan Sherwin-White and Amelie Kurt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 45.

³¹ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 80.

³² *Ibid.*, 87.

³³ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁵ *Ibid.* See also Erich Gruen, "Fact and Fiction," who says that "the tracing of relationships between cities, states, or peoples through supposed genealogical links and imagined common ancestors regularly appears in Greek literary speculation—a familiar feature in Hellenic folklore and legend," 76.

³⁶ *Ant. Jud.* 14.255.

³⁷ John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 17. Collins observes the possibility that other literature (including early Hellenistic

poem about the Jews in Palestine as early as the third or early second century B.C.E.³⁸ That Greek was the *lingua franca* in the Diaspora and in Palestine cannot be disputed. Hellenistic-Jewish writers especially stressed the antiquity of the Jews, their religion, the temple in Jerusalem, and the Torah because the antiquity of national and ethnic origins was important to them in assessing the prestige of their people and the validity of what they taught and valued. This notion of antiquity was especially important in demonstrating the honor and esteem of a people. Thus Hellenistic writers sought to maintain and preserve their traditional beliefs by elevating their ancestors. This is the frame work we should employ in our investigation of Abraham in the Hellenistic period and, consequently, in our understanding Paul's interpretation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25.

Hellenistic-Jewish Traditions: A Confluence/Clash of Cultures

Jews of the Diaspora undoubtedly came into close contact with the institutions, language, literature, art, and traditions of Hellas in cities like Alexandria, Cyrene, Antioch, and Ephesus, even to the point of losing touch with Hebrew.³⁹ However, in the midst of this confrontation, the Jews engaged actively with the traditions of Hellas, adapting genres and transforming legends to articulate their own legacy in modes congenial to a Hellenistic setting. The Scriptures inspired respect of ancestors and also stimulated creative thinking. In other words, Hellenistic writers used the Bible as a springboard for creativity. By appropriating Hellenistic modes of self-esteem, the Diaspora Jews sharpened their self-image and reinforced their sense of superiority by recasting their founders in Hellenistic garb.

In colonial times, culture tends to survive through art, drama, and story telling. The Jews recreated their past, retold stories in different shapes, and amplified the scriptural corpus itself through the mediums of Greek language and Greek literary forms.⁴⁰ In a world where Hel-

texts of the *Testament of Abraham* and Philo the Poet) may also have originated in Judea.

³⁸ See Carl R. Holladay, ed., *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 2 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 74–5, 137, 179.

³⁹ Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, xiv.

⁴⁰ Guido Kisch, *Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, Publications in Mediaeval Studies, 10 (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame, 1949), 17.

lenic culture held ascendant position, Jews strained to develop their own cultural self-definition, one that would give them a place within the broader Mediterranean world and would establish their distinctiveness.⁴¹ Writers like Josephus and Philo developed literary strategies to redefine their people and history in terms familiar to contemporary Hellenistic culture, while simultaneously keeping faith with ancestral practices and beliefs. Hence, the expansive reinterpretation and recasting of biblical traditions to enhance the exploits of ancient heroes and embellish the legendary success of the nation took center stage.

The age of the Maccabees is a poignant example of what happens when indigenous cultures are threatened. Jewish rebellion against the harsh impositions of the persecutor Antiochus IV led to a shaking off of the Syrian political yoke and the emergence of an autonomous state under the Hasmonaean dynasty. This clash supplies the *locus classicus* for a fundamental split between Judaism and Hellenism. The myth of the past represented by ancient heroes took center stage. The Hebrew heroes began to appear in new guises and new circumstances. The tale of Abraham was turned into a myth of a cultural hero, and the Scriptures stimulated the talents of Hellenistic Jews.

It is necessary to reconstruct the religious and cultural context within which Jews, pagans, and Christians alike were living. By the second century B.C.E., the relationship between Hellenism and Judaism was undergoing radical changes, so much so that numerous Jewish religious groups emerged. In this religious diversity, each group propounded its own distinctive identity based on founding ancestors. It is a mistake to label Diaspora Judaism as marginally Jewish because an encounter with multiple cultures meant inventions and refashioning of identities.

Thus, to ignore the encounter of Hellenism and Judaism in much of Pauline readings is to ignore a major element in exegesis. Focusing on these cultures provides a unique cross-cultural interpretation of the Bible. As indicated above, the terms *Joudaismos* and *Hellenismos* first appear in the text of 2 Maccabees.⁴² The use of these terms

See also the book of *Jubilees*, written by a Jew who considers himself faithful to God's covenant in the midst of many compatriots who, by bowing to Hellenism, are unfaithful in his eyes. See also James VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees, Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 140.

⁴¹ Gruen, "Fact and Fiction," xv.

⁴² Ibid., 72.

indicates a possible clash or a confluence between the cultures. Hellenism seemed to claim pride of place as the most powerful culture in the second century. Martin Hengel argues that the Jews' encounter with Hellenism threatened their culture, tradition, and faith.⁴³ The spread of Hellenism, so it has been said, meant an erosion of ancestral Jewish practices and belief systems. In other words, Hellenism as a colonial power offered the Jews two choices: assimilation or resistance. And for the purposes of this book we need to focus on how the Jews in Palestine and Diaspora managed to remain a distinctive cultural group.

I seek to demonstrate that the Jewish teacher's presentation of Abraham in Romans 4 is not peculiar to him, but he expresses a cultural view that was common to many Jews. At the same time, Paul reclaims a new Abraham for a wider community. Paul becomes a cultural critic and seeks to reinterpret Judaism in a radical manner. Daniel Boyarin asserts that Paul "represents the interface between Jew as self-identical essence and as a construction constantly being remade."⁴⁴ The truth of this assertion should not be doubted as it characterizes all who live in diverse cultural tensions who are trying to maintain their identities. Paul is an embodiment of cultures attempting to embrace Christianity in their various cultural contexts. He does not want all cultures to be Jewish; rather, each individual culture's identity may remain intact as the people see God speak to their culture.

In Romans 4, Paul elevates Abraham as an ancestor of a new Israel, which includes Jews and Gentiles. Second, Romans 4 represents a destruction of ideological ties and the birth of a new relationship whose DNA is faith in God who raises the dead (Rom 4:17–18). I contend that Paul was by and large influenced by his cross-cultural exposure to the culture of Greeks and Romans. In this new situation, Paul gives a new meaning to the Torah as an integrator of all nations of the world. Thus, by reading Romans cross-culturally, we "overcome the remoteness and strangeness of the texts by employing the reader's cultural resources and social experiences to make links across the cultural divides, thus illuminating the biblical narratives."⁴⁵

⁴³ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 247–54.

⁴⁴ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 3.

⁴⁵ Douglas A. Knight, *Methods of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 313.

Cross-culturally, Paul's impulse is toward universalism, toward the founding of a non-differentiated humanity based on Abraham. Thus, we see Paul reacting to the imperialistic cultural forces of the day. The force of Hellenism meant that the Jews were pressured to conform to the Greek culture and way of living. It is clear in 2 Maccabees that the text points to the struggles Jews faced under Antiochus Epiphanes. Second Maccabees clearly shows that both Hellenism and Judaism were competing cultures. The power of this cultural competition has been obscured by Western New Testament scholars whose understanding of cultural power has been undermined by capitalism and a lack of exposure to world cultures.

One issue this study addresses is how Jewish intellectuals accommodated themselves to the larger Mediterranean cultural world while simultaneously reaffirming the character of their traditions within it. The answer lies in the centrality of Abraham as the cultural ancestor of a despised nation. Philo and Josephus take care to affirm the antiquity and honor of the Jewish nation, while Paul expands and exalts Abraham as a universal figure. Unlike Aeneas, Abraham is a wandering Jew with no fixed home; however, like Aeneas, his divine purpose is to establish a new people—God's people. By presenting Abraham as a competing ancestor, Paul is overturning the structures of power within the Greco-Roman world, something that is both scandalous and provocative.

An intriguing element can be found in the elaboration of legends and inventions, by which the Jews and Hellas refashioned and recast tradition for self-esteem and identity purposes. The Hellenic and Jewish cultural legacies helped to define each group as having a powerful pedigree that invited reconciliation and collaboration in a new world. Thus, kinship associations become crucial for both cultures. The tracing of relationships between cities, states, or peoples through supposed genealogical links and imagined common ancestors regularly appears in Hellenic folklore and legends.⁴⁶ This motif is also found in the Deutro-Canonical literature which expounds upon the ancestorship of Abraham. In some writings we find attestations of connections between Greeks and Jews. In fact, tradition holds that Jews and Spartans both descended from the line of Abraham. We learn that King

⁴⁶ Gruen, "Jewish Legends," 8.

Areus and the Judean High Priest Onias had blood ties deriving from their common ancestor Abraham.⁴⁷

In another instance, Jonathan, successor to Judas, wrote a letter to the Spartan embassy and addressed the Lacedaemonians as brothers, and thus renewed the friendship and alliance between the two nations.⁴⁸ The Spartans responded in the same manner. Equally revealing in Jonathan's letter is the benefactor language in which Abraham becomes a benefactor to both Jews and Lacedaemonians. Here, we find Abraham functioning as a symbol of reconciliation and alliance between nations. In Josephus's view, kinship affiliation carried cultural and political implications. This invention was not peculiar to the Jews; the Greeks and Romans made use of it as well. Abraham as the ultimate progenitor makes the Aeneas case a relevant paradigm for comprehending Romans 4:1–25.

When Jewish intellectuals went into Diaspora, they found this ancestor invention in operation and they adopted it to affirm and elevate their identity. Diaspora Jews like Josephus, Eupolemus, and Philo took up the Hellenistic genre of apologetic historiography and used it to present Jewish history and culture.⁴⁹ The Jews in Diaspora remained deeply rooted in their own native culture and traditions and they fitted well into the wider Hellenistic world. While the Jews claimed similar traditions, they were also able to establish that Abraham was their ancestor. This proved to the Greeks and Romans that the Jews had similar ancient traditions worthy of emulation. Hence, the point was not assimilation to Hellenism; rather the issue was the value attached to tradition and the identity of ancestors.

The information provided by Hellenistic Jewish historians indicates that when Jews went into Diaspora, they probably attempted to link themselves with the epic traditions of the Greeks and Romans. Clearly the Jews had a fierce loyalty to their religion and were willing to die, if necessary, to adhere to it. However, they managed to reinvent themselves within the context of the Hellenistic culture as people who prided themselves in ancestors. In other words, Josephus and Philo used Hel-

⁴⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 12.225–7. Areios, quoting from a document, writes a letter to King Onias saying, “We have come upon a certain document from which we have learned that the Jews and Lacedaemonians are of one race and are related by descent from Abraham.”

⁴⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 12.225–7, 13.164–70.

⁴⁹ Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 243.

lenistic tropes, models, and literary forms to describe the ancestor of the Jews in terms comprehensive and compelling to a non Jewish audience. Much of this transformation and audacity resulted from the influence of Greek literature and thought. The new did not drive out the old; rather, the new assisted the old to reinvent itself in a powerful manner. Greco-Roman culture did not replace Jewish traditions and ancestral ways of worship. The two existed and moved forward in a creative synthesis in which the native elements were not submerged but continued to revitalize Jewish culture even as it responded to new conditions and influences.⁵⁰

The Jews were in no position to challenge the political supremacy of Hellenistic powers, whether in Palestine or in the Diaspora. Politically, they acknowledged their subordinate position. However, writers like Josephus and Philo assist us in comprehending how the Jews appropriated the Hellenistic culture and redefined it in their own cultural terms, adopting categories and genres that would be familiar to a Greco-Roman audience of the Augustan Age. Elevating Abraham meant that the Jews were eager to make "vivid their spiritual and intellectual precedence associated with their traditions."⁵¹

Through creative fictions like kinship connections, tales of homage paid by Hellenistic rulers to Jewish values, and the supposed Jewish roots of Greek culture, the Jews not only affirmed their place in the larger Hellenistic community, but also articulated their special identity in a way that bolstered self-esteem by asserting their cultural ascendancy in spite of their political subordination.⁵² The Jewish intellectuals did not rush to attach themselves to Hellenic ancestors. Their ancestor was Abraham, not Heracles or Aeneas. Paul's contemporaries and later Jewish authors clearly identified Abraham as their ancestor. God's covenant with Abraham became the basis of God's relationship with all descendants.

With the aim of further appropriating Abraham in the Greco-Roman context, we now turn to issues of identity. This inquiry will focus on the function of Abraham as an ancestor of the Jewish people. The formulations of the Augustan period yield critical insight into the Jews' reformulations of their own identity. Most New Testament

⁵⁰ Lester L. Grabbe, "Hellenistic Judaism," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Judaism in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 69.

⁵¹ Gruen, *Jewish Legends*, 88.

⁵² Ibid.

scholars have argued that the issue in Romans is the conflict between Jewish and Greek Christians,⁵³ yet the issue is more complex than that. I contend that the political and religio-cultural context is the bone of contention in Romans. We need not look far to discover that the issue of Abraham was a contested battle ground.

The texts known as the Pseudepigrapha are rich with genealogical metaphors that claim Abraham as the ancestor of the Jews. The issue that arose during the Second Temple period revolves around identity based on Abraham. From this period on, Abraham's role as a key to how the Jewish people perceived their identity became a central focus. It is also intriguing to see how Paul reinterpreted the tradition in the face of the Greeks and Romans whose identities were derived from Aeneas. To appreciate the role of Abraham, I will focus briefly on the issue of identity and then move on to a discussion of Abraham as portrayed in Second Temple literature and in Philo and Josephus.

The Idiom of Identity

In chapter one, I discussed at length the role and function of family ties and how kinship was a major organizational principle of the Augustan Age. Identities are created and formulated around a common ancestor who is considered the parent of all people living in a society. To make the case clear, I will use some of Philip Esler's social identity theories. While these theories apply to a Christian group, they can also be used to describe what goes on between groups of different nationalities. The social-identity theory⁵⁴ which refers to a person's self-concept in his or her relations within a group is probably the one most applicable to our discussion. The issue of belonging to a group and the values attached to such belonging is not just a psychological issue, but a social, cultural, emotional, economic, and political issue

⁵³ See Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 26. He has intriguing insights on group conflicts in Romans, especially between Judean and non-Judean members. However, he ignores the fact that Rome was a melting pot of cultures, a cosmopolitan crowd of different cultures and peoples, brought forcibly by slavery, or attracted by need and ambition to this exceptional center of wealth and power.

⁵⁴ Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, 20. See also Eric. M. Meyers and James F. Strange, eds., *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 78–86. A more detailed study is found in R. D. Minard, "Race Relationships in the Pocahontas Coal Field," *Journal of Social Issues* 8 (1952): 29–44.

as well. This theory allows one group to have a positive identity in the face of (or over against) others.

Embedded in social identity theory are issues of norms and values that are crucial to the survival of a normal society. Hence, we see the issue of Torah and circumcision becoming defining and descriptive markers among Jews, Greeks, and Romans.⁵⁵ Norms help to maintain and enhance a group's identity while also excluding others who are not part of the group. Thus, Diaspora writers such as Philo and Josephus held themselves as champions of Judaism. This was a necessary move as it encouraged Greeks and Romans to respect Jewish religious rites and teachings. This takes us to the next level of this theory, namely stereotyping. This phenomenon focuses on the notion of 'in group' and 'out group' differentiation. The stereotyping at play in Romans is not just against Judeans and non-Judeans, but is found in the ideology of the Augustan Age.

Social identity and time are two sides of the same coin. Collective identities are tied to the past and remain in the subconscious of a group. The past tends to feed the collective memory of a group whose roots are found in ancestral traditions. Social time and ancestors are inseparable phenomena, in that a group continues to reenact rituals that will commemorate the past. Thus, remembering becomes a way of identifying with the past.⁵⁶ In this case, the past becomes a contested space. Paul's discussion of Abraham in Romans 4 should illuminate our understanding that he is not just speaking of Abraham as a prototype.⁵⁷ Rather, Abraham becomes an ancestor of all nations, including Judeans and non-Judeans. I argue that we cannot limit the function of Abraham as a prototype; rather, he is an ancestor of all who share his faith. This will be dealt with when we come to a discussion of Paul's interpretation of Genesis 15:6. For now, suffice it to say that Paul's reaction mobilizes a piece of collective memory in order to maintain ethnic and social identity boundaries.

⁵⁵ See Martin Goodman, "Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century," in Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak, eds., *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1992), 54. See also Philo, *Virtues* 35.187.

⁵⁶ 'Remembering' in this book refers to the process by which past memories and events are brought into awareness by a present generation through rituals and ceremonies.

⁵⁷ 'Prototype' in this book refers to a representative figure who typifies the group. A good example is Winston Churchill who exemplifies Britishness. Although a deceased person, he still typifies his group.

Related to social identity and time is the theory of self-categorization which manifests itself in the notion of membership. In essence, membership beliefs force outsiders to want to belong to the in-group. To enter this group, one must redefine himself or herself to embrace that group's ideals. Thus, an identity becomes a contested phenomenon, one that is won either by assimilation or accommodation.⁵⁸ In Galatians, Paul appeals to the Galatian Christians whose zeal for the Lord caused them to accept circumcision. Paul cries out to them, "become as I am, for I have become as you are" (Gal 4:12).⁵⁹ In other words, Paul allows us to see the dilemma of living in cultural tension and how this tension can dehumanize the weaker culture. Paul's Christ event understanding speaks of radical innovation from within a tradition, and of a radical head-on confrontation with the Imperial traditions. In lifting up Abraham as a spiritual ancestor, Paul creatively and radically reduces intercultural bias. Jews and Gentiles can become children of Abraham on the basis of something deeper than ethnicity, namely faith. Paul imagines an identity and community that is universal in scope. Gentiles do not have to become Jews to be children of Abraham, nor must Jews become Gentiles. Thus, faith becomes the basis of collaboration and reconciliation. From a social-science perspective, Paul is reducing conflict by recategorizing rival nationalities under a common ancestor. Borrowing from Philip Esler's theory of recategorization, I assert that Paul saw the success of this approach in Rome's colonization of Greece and appropriated it to create a superordinate group whose identity is based solely on faith. We must now define what faith means, and identify how one can talk of faith within subgroups. I will do this partly in this chapter and in chapter three.

⁵⁸ 'Assimilation' in this book refers to social integration (becoming similar to one's neighbors); it concerns social contacts, social interaction, and social practices. In assimilation we assess the degree to which Diaspora Jews were integrated into, or socially aloof from, their social environment. 'Accommodation' refers to the level to which acculturation/Greek education influenced Jews. In particular, this refers to the degree to which Jewish and Hellenistic cultural traditions merged, or alternatively, polarized. The question accommodation poses is into what framework did Greek education place Jews? For a description of these two words, see John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan* (323 B.C.E.–117 C.E.), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 92–8.

⁵⁹ See Nils A. Dahl, "Paul's Letter to the Galatians: Epistolary Genre, Content, and Structure," in Mark D. Nanos, ed., *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 117–42, 133–4.

Both Paul and the Jewish Christian teacher are seeking a norm of identity (righteousness), and I argue that both are seeking reconciliation of Jews with other peoples of the world. The Jewish Christian teacher is also a missionary. However, ethnic identity is a fundamental aspect of an individual's self-concept and esteem and it is not easy to modify. This is where the African notion of *ubuntu* becomes crucial in defining an African Christian. (I will discuss this concept further in chapter three.) What we need to appreciate is how Paul appropriated (and then subverted) the Augustan method of reconciling mutually different cultures under Aeneas.⁶⁰ In Romans 4:1–25 we have a new Abraham, an Abraham who is no longer a Jewish cultural hero but a spiritual ancestor for all people. Thus, Abraham becomes a counter-cultural hero to Aeneas, in that he is from a despised group, but because of his faith he is the ancestor of all who choose to emulate him. However, what remains to be addressed is the status of Abraham in Hellenistic-Jewish contexts.

The theories we have discussed above are crucial in helping us comprehend the difficulty Pauline Christianity faced during the Julian-Claudian era. We also see that the connection between social identity and time remains part of a nation's history and open to continuous reinterpretation from one generation to the next. Paul does not disregard all these traditions; rather, he honors a culture's past, present, and future. Thus he becomes a cross-cultural Paul who is able to contextualize the gospel. Cross-culturally, Paul's Damascus experience is a transformation rather than a conversion.⁶¹ With these theories, we can now proceed to investigate the function of Abraham in Hellenistic-Jewish contexts.

Abraham In Greco-Roman Sources

The fact that scholars have given little attention to Abraham as an ancestor does not mean that the Greeks and Romans of the Augustan

⁶⁰ Philip Esler makes this point with regard to reducing conflict: "This is not to suggest that Paul was a good social identity theorist. I am rather suggesting that his familiarity with the pronounced inter- and intra-group phenomena of his culture probably taught him lessons about reconciling mutually antipathetic groups that we are now learning through empirical research," 31.

⁶¹ See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 40. Gaventa argues that "Paul does not reject the past, rather it has been subjected by the advent of the Messiah."

Age did not find him appealing. The identity theories we outlined above are adequate to persuade New Testament readers to investigate the centrality of ancestors in Pauline exegesis. Reading Philo and Josephus through a cross-cultural hermeneutic will reveal that these Jewish-Hellenistic writers maintained a dialectical tension with Greek and Roman traditions. The stimulus for their writing was to plant Jewish culture within the cultural fabric of the Greco-Roman world. Thus our inquiry should focus on the following questions: (1) What are our sources for developing the Hellenistic-Jewish view of Abraham? (2) What is the myth/legend that these sources illuminate? (3) Who is Abraham compared to other Greco-Roman heroes? (4) How did Abraham function for the Jews that were in Diaspora? (5) How do Jewish intellectuals in the Diaspora portray Abraham? (6) How was the tradition of Abraham honored in the Hellenistic and Jewish context? and (7) To what extent did Greco-Roman ancestor traditions influence Paul's interpretation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25? Answering these questions will assist us in understanding Paul's interpretation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25.

Interestingly, Abraham appears in the writings of eleven Greco-Roman authors, covering a time span of approximately 800 years.⁶² Josephus writes about Berossus, who was the first to mention Abraham.⁶³ Abraham is also mentioned by Apollonius Molon, Alexander Polyhistor, Nicolaus of Damascus, Pompeius Torgus, Charax of Pergamum, Vettius Valens, Alexander of Lycopolis, Fermicus Maternus, and the Emperor Julian. There is also a reference to Abraham in the enigmatic *Historia Augusta* in regard to Julian⁶⁴ and Alexander Polyhistor. The fact that these Greco-Roman authors mention Abraham indicates that he was interesting to people whose identity was defined by heroes and founding fathers. Most of the relevant information on

⁶² Jeffrey S. Siker, "Abraham in Greco-Roman Paganism," in *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 18 (1988): 189. See also Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 1, *Historians* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 51–189.

⁶³ *Ant.* 1.158. Here Josephus writes, "Berossus mentions our father Abraham, without naming him, in these terms: In the tenth generation after the flood there lived among the Chaldeans a just man and great and versed in celestial lore."

⁶⁴ Siker, 190. See also Mennahem Stern, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, 1974), 502. In this tractate, the Emperor Julian shows a clear preference for Judaism over Christianity, expressing admiration for Abraham who used to sacrifice in the Hellenic way, applying divination to the shooting stars and augury to the flight of birds.

Abraham is found in Philo and Josephus, the two first-century Hellenistic-Jewish writers who incorporated Abraham into Hellenistic literary genres. Thus, they managed to maintain the distinctiveness of the Jewish nation in the midst of the Greeks and Romans as people defined by a common ancestor. This will be evident when we investigate Philo's and Josephus's portrayal of Abraham below. For now, suffice it to say that Abrahamic traditions were well preserved in the Greco-Roman world of the Augustan period.

Besides Philo and Josephus, we have Jewish and Christian traditions which indirectly preserve the Greco-Roman views of Abraham. Primarily, we have the evidence of Abrahamic traditions from the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, various other Hellenistic Jewish authors, and later rabbinic writings. Most of the sources on Abraham come from the eastern Roman Empire or eastern Mediterranean, with Berossus and Nicolaus of Damascus coming from the region of greater Syria. The earliest reference to Abraham appears in a sixth-century C.E. document written by the neoplatonic thinker Damascius.⁶⁵ Here, Abraham is referred to as the "father of the old Hebrews,"⁶⁶ and one who had his own religion.

In reading Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* (1.154–168), we can infer that he was acquainted with all the pagan sources on Abraham.⁶⁷ Apollonius Molon (first century B.C.E.), one of those sources, presents Abraham as the origin of various peoples, namely Arabs and Jews.⁶⁸ According to Nicolaus of Damascus (64 B.C.E.), Abraham came with an army from the country beyond Babylon called the Chaldees.⁶⁹ Intriguingly, this story is similar to the biblical story of Abraham in Genesis 12, and Josephus and Philo creatively appropriate that same story in their presentation of Jewish ancestors.

Nicolaus of Damascus is crucial in our reading of Abraham in the Greco-Roman world. Since Josephus used him as a source we can surmise that he held pride of place among Hellenistic historians. Nicolaus entered the service of Herod in 14 B.C.E., and was one of Herod's chief counselors, representing the Herodian house on various occasions.

⁶⁵ Stern, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors*, vol. 2, 674.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Louis H. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The Portrait of Abraham," in Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, eds., *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 136.

⁶⁸ Siker, 192.

⁶⁹ Stern, vol. 1, 233.

One of his accomplishments was defending the interests of the Jewish communities against the claims of the Greek cities before King Agrippa.⁷⁰ His writings mention famous Jewish personalities such as Abraham and Moses in contexts that do not relate to Jews. Thus, we are more indebted to Nicolaus for our knowledge of Jewish history in the Hellenistic and early Roman period because the historical works of Josephus depend so heavily on the work of Nicolaus. As a personal friend and servant of a Jewish King, Nicolaus respected the Jewish past and traditions more than most of the Greco-Roman writers, and had high esteem for the historical information contained in the Bible.⁷¹

Nicolaus of Damascus mentions in the fourth book of his *Histories*: “Abrames reigned in Damascus; a foreigner who had come with an army from the country beyond Babylon called the land of the Chaldees.”⁷² Abraham was not in this land long; he soon left with his people for the land called Canaan (which we now call Judea) where he settled and had numerous descendants.⁷³ People in the Damascus region still celebrate the name of Abram, as evidenced by a village there called “Abram’s abode.”⁷⁴ From this information we conclude that Abraham was a wandering Jew who settled in places and became the founder of a people.

The only other pagan author who mentions the origin of Abraham is the emperor Julian (C.E. 361–363), who follows the Biblical account, referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being Chaldeans of a “sacred race,”⁷⁵ or εθνος. Julian’s views on Judaism can be found in the “apostate,” or emperor’s polemic against the *Galileans*, that is the Christians.⁷⁶ Julian praised the Jews’ loyalty to their ancestral worship and customs, and he acknowledges that the Jews were very devout. As a Greco-Roman Emperor, Julian greatly admired Jewish sacrificial worship, perhaps because it was a common practice among Greeks and Romans. Julian’s framework is that of sacrifices and building altars to

⁷⁰ *Ant.* XVI.27–30.

⁷¹ Stern, vol. 1, 231.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Stern, vol. 2, 543.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 502. See also Aryeh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea Against Pagans* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 5–6. In these times, Christians were regarded as enemies of the gods, the Emperor, and the laws and customs of the society. They were traitors of the empire who had abandoned their ancestral tradition. This is where Emperor Julian comes in praise of the Jewish religion and, consequently, Abraham.

Zeus. Second, Julian places the Jewish myths on the same level as the incredible tales about the gods found in Greek mythology, including Kronos swallowing his children and Zeus's outrageous sexual desires.⁷⁷ In his reaction, Julian refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as wanderers or sojourners, as strangers in Egypt who learned the practice of circumcision.⁷⁸

Julian's writings provide important clues as to how the Greco-Roman world viewed Abraham. First, he mentions that "Abraham revered God who was ever gracious to him and to those who worshiped him as Abraham did, for he is a great and powerful God, but he has nothing to do with you [Christians]."⁷⁹ Julian always revered the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a God who was always "propitious to Julian himself, and to those who worshipped him as Abraham did."⁸⁰ In Julian's view, this God had "nothing to do with Christians, for they did not imitate Abraham by erecting altars to God as Abraham did, and worshipping him with sacrifices."⁸¹ Julian constructs an argument against Christians in the Greco-Roman world and shows how they failed to imitate Abraham. In pagan worship, people erected altars to sacrifice to their gods.

Julian in his writings compared Abraham to Greco-Roman ancestors who also erected altars of sacrifice. Julian goes further to say that "Abraham used to sacrifice even as we [pagans] do, always and continually."⁸² Abraham also engaged in the practice of divination from shooting stars.⁸³ Hellas also engaged in this practice. Hence, Abrahamic traditions were well known in the Greco-Roman world, but were not well publicized, perhaps because Abraham was an ancestor of a despised people.

Similar respect for Abraham appears in a long fragment attributed to Eupolemus by Alexander Polyhistor (first century B.C.E.). Whether the work came from Eupolemus or was misascribed by Polyhistor need not concern us at this point. Portions of Genesis are rewritten, mixed with Babylonian and Greek legends so as to exalt Abraham as

⁷⁷ Ibid., 503.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 543.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 505.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

a world historical figure.⁸⁴ In this fragment, Abraham is the central figure, but with a Hellenistic portrayal. He is described as a man of εὐγένεια and σοφία; Philo and Josephus also attribute these virtues to Abraham. Because of these attributes, Abraham is credited with discovering astrology and Chaldean science, while still maintaining the piety that won him God's favor.⁸⁵ Abraham's stature further increased after he shared all this knowledge with the Phoenicians, explaining to them the movements of the sun and moon. In the same fragment, we encounter Abraham dwelling with Egyptian priests in Heliopolis, supplying them with a wealth of knowledge about astrology and a range of additional subjects. Abraham associated himself here with the Babylonians, declaring that he and they were equally responsible for their discovery, but giving ultimate credit to the fabled Enoch rather than to the Egyptians.⁸⁶

The Genesis narrative served less as a text for exegesis than as a springboard for creativity and self-identification. Even Philo and Josephus used the Bible not for exegetical purposes but as a launching pad for their national pride and cultural defense. Thus, Pseudo-Eupolemus's elaborations are embellished tales connected with divergent traditions meant to exalt Abraham above Greco-Roman heroes. Babylonian legends and Greek mythology were appropriated to invent Jewish heroes. These cross-cultural identifications were not aimed at discrediting pagan traditions or to undermine polytheistic interpretations; rather, the aim was to recast their foundations. Unlike other Jewish writers, Eupolemus traces his people to Enoch through his son Methuselah. Thus, he associates Abraham with the heritage of Enoch and has him transmit the fruits of his knowledge to Phoenicia and Egypt. This, as is often said, makes Abraham a universal rather than just a national hero.⁸⁷ In Eupolemus's portrayal, Abraham occupies center stage, even while straying from the biblical narratives. As a universal figure, Abraham brings culture and learning to the great nations of the Near East and, through them, to Hellas.

⁸⁴ *Praep. ev.* 9.17.1–9.

⁸⁵ *Praep. ev.* 9.17.3.

⁸⁶ Euseb. 9.17.8. The association of Abraham with astrology is widespread in Second Temple and rabbinic literature. See Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* 1. 62.

⁸⁷ Gregory Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 204.

The national figure is both the progenitor of the Jews and mentor of other peoples of the Mediterranean world. This creative reinvention of the ancient past absorbs a range of traditions but subordinates them to the achievements of the Hebrew patriarch. Thus, to Jewish readers, this portrayal would reinforce a sense of cultural identity and self-esteem. To the Greeks and Romans, it could raise a sense of appreciation and acceptance. The same figure who is the ancestor of Jews and purveyor of culture to other peoples also appears in a fragment of Artapanus. As in Pseudo-Eupolemus, the Abraham of Artapanus brought the science of astrology to Egypt. Artapanus goes even further in stating that Abraham mentored the Egyptian leaders.⁸⁸ The Genesis narrative has none of this. Nor does it support the idea that Abraham lived in Egypt for twenty years and that, when he departed, he left many of his followers behind.⁸⁹ However, these traditions seem to strengthen the association of Abraham with Egypt, and to establish continuity between the patriarch's stay in Egypt and the development of Egyptian culture.

In his writings, Artapanus sets Abraham and his people in the midst of ancient civilizations. Thus, he makes the Jewish nation a pivotal contributor to the origin of culture and learning. More to the point, he specifies Abraham as the Jewish ancestor who played a critical part in generating and transmitting Near Eastern learning. Artapanus's aim was to locate the Hebrew patriarch at the center of ancient culture with obvious reverberations for Hellenistic Jews in Palestine and Diaspora. The Abraham stories could have originated earlier, elsewhere, and under any number of possible circumstances. What matters most is not the origin of the legend but its meaning and implications.

Three aspects stand out from the Greco-Roman pagan sources and these are also crucial in illuminating the purposes of this book. First, the wisdom and righteousness of Abraham stand out as virtues in the Greco-Roman world.⁹⁰ Second, Abraham is portrayed as an army general and political leader. Third, his astrological and philosophical skills are highly elevated.⁹¹ These traditions helped Jewish intellectuals establish their cultural superiority over the Greeks and Romans.

⁸⁸ Holladay, *Fragments*, vol. 1, *Historians*, 226–7, n. 6.

⁸⁹ *Praep. ev.* 9.18.1.

⁹⁰ In *Ant.* 1.158, Josephus writes that Berossus refers to Abraham as “a righteous man and experienced in celestial affairs.”

⁹¹ Stern, vol. 2, 543.

Abraham's sons are believed to have immigrated to Arabia and to have divided the country among themselves.⁹² Abraham's sons were the first to be kings over the inhabitants of this country. The implications of an Abrahamic dynasty will be dealt with later when we compare Aeneas and Abraham. For now it suffices to say that Abraham proved to be a founder and conqueror of various nations and his descendants were found in many parts of the ancient world. In essence, Abraham is seen as the father of the Arabian kings. He is equally the ancestor of the Jewish nation, as Apollonius makes him the grandfather of Joseph and the great-great-grandfather of Moses.⁹³

Abraham was best known among the Greeks and Romans for his knowledge of astrology, and this was affirmed by Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*. Vettius Valens, a second-century B.C.E. historian, asserts that

On traveling, from the works of Hermippus.... The most wonderful Abrahimos has shown us about this position in his book, and he himself on this part invented other things and tested them, especially on genitures inclined to travelling.⁹⁴

This passage claims that Abraham was the author of an astrological work based on his own inventions and testing. Second, we are confronted with Abraham as a traveling philosopher, an aspect which assimilates Abraham to Greco-Roman philosophers.

The extent to which Abraham was revered in the Greco-Roman world is reflected in the *Historia Augusta* (fourth century C.E.). The following passage describes the Emperor Alexander Severus's daily life:

His [Alexander Severus's] manner of living was as follows: in the morning hours he would worship in the sanctuary of his Lares, in which he kept statues of deified emperors of whom, however, only the best had been selected and also of certain holy souls, among them Apollonius, and according to a contemporary writer, Christ, Abraham, Orpheus and others of the same character and, besides the portraits of his ancestors.⁹⁵

Alexander Severus, like Julian, respected the "privileges of the Jews and allowed the Christians to exist unmolested."⁹⁶ Alexander not only

⁹² *Ant.* 11.212–6.

⁹³ Apollonius Molon, in M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 1, 150.

⁹⁴ On this aspect of writing astrological work and traveling, see Stern, vol. 2, 174–5.

⁹⁵ Stern, vol. 2, 631.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 615.

revered the God of Abraham but “in the sanctuary of his Lares the emperor kept not only the best among the deified emperors and of pagan celebrities like Apollonius, but also those of Christ and Abraham.”⁹⁷ Above all, it is important to note that Abraham is not identified as a Jew, but is mentioned as a forefather to the Jews, a quality that will assist us in comparing the Trojan Aeneas with Abraham the Chaldean. Here again we see that Abraham is a social construct. Thus, we now know that with the rise of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world, ancestral traditions were creatively molded to define Christian faith.

What new ideas or understandings were given birth through the encounter of Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures? The encounter was a world-historical epoch of a kind that resulted in the two cultures mutually and creatively transforming one another. Each culture proselytized the other. In essence, without this cultural fusion, Christianity would not have been born. Johann-Gustav Droysen stated as much when he wrote that

without the Greco-Oriental cultural fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of *Hellenismus*, the seed of the Christian gospel would have fallen on barren ground. In the happy event, it fell rather into a fertile seedbed of Hellenizing Judaism watered by the universal fountain of Rome’s global empire. Had Paul not been a Hellenized Roman citizen, and had there not been suitably Hellenized Jews both in Palestine and in the Jewish diaspora, Christianity would have been doomed to remain, and probably soon wither and die, as a tiny, parochial Jewish sect.⁹⁸

That the new religion spread and flourished universally was possible, according to Droysen, only through the establishment of *Hellenismus*, the Hellenistic world and its culture so fertile for the reception of ideas and traditions. Thus, a cultural fusion and blending deserves to be reconsidered in Pauline exegesis. The question we need to answer is how Abraham functioned within the Hellenistic Jewish context.

Abraham In Intertestamental Literature: An Encomium

As Greco-Roman paganism contested the rise of Christianity, the legacy of Abraham took on a new form. First, the legacy became a

⁹⁷ Ibid., 615–6.

⁹⁸ J. G. Droysen, “Between Greeks and Jews,” in G. Bowersock and T. J. Cornell, eds., *Studies on Modern Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 147–61.

contested entity that Jews were eager to maintain and preserve. The most striking thing about the Jewish encounter with Hellenism in the Diaspora was the persistence of Jewish separatism in matters of worship and ancestral veneration. That distinction was extraordinary in the ancient world, and Abraham's place among Jews of the Diaspora assumed a new position for both Hellenistic writers and Paul. For the Jews who faced cultural encroachments and political changes, descent from Abraham meant preservation even to the point of death. Hellenistic authors wrote about Abraham to demonstrate to the Greek world that Israel's ancestors surpassed those of other nations, including the Greeks. This encomium or Praise of Ancestors is idealistic and is used to trace the history of Israel through great leaders, which is a Greek technique. The question that arose during the Second Temple period and during the cultural fusion of Hellenism and Judaism focused on the identity of the descendants of Abraham. Specifically, it focused on the centrality of Abraham vis-à-vis other ancestors. Jewish writings of this period and Paul's writings provide us with a frame in which Abraham was viewed.

Traditionally speaking, Jews in both spheres saw Abraham as their ancestor by natural descent. The writings of Josephus and Philo point out that Abraham was, genetically speaking, the forefather of the Jews. From a comparison with Second Temple and rabbinic sources, it is evident that Josephus's and Philo's expansive reinterpretation of Genesis 12–36 stands firmly in the early Jewish tradition of celebrating Abraham as the one from whom the Hebrews sprang and to whom they owed their distinctiveness.⁹⁹ Both Philo and Josephus wrote to explain Jewish culture to non-Jews by means of ancestors such as Abraham. This appeal to ancestors in the service of apologetics was common among Jews who addressed Greeks and Romans of the Augustan Age.¹⁰⁰ During the Second Temple era, spiritual or physical descent from Abraham also provided a sense of identity.¹⁰¹ The authors of early Jewish texts portrayed Abraham as a kind of cipher through which the Jews could discern what it meant to be an ideal

⁹⁹ See *Ant.* 1.158, where Josephus refers to Abraham as πατήρ ἡμῶν.

¹⁰⁰ For an elaboration on the power of ancestral traditions, see Walter Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," in Karl Galinsky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Age of Augustus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13–32.

¹⁰¹ Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, *Paul, Monotheism and the People of God: The Significance of Abraham Traditions for Early Judaism and Christianity*, a continuum imprint (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 1.

person of God.¹⁰² In other words, Abraham is an ancestor of the Jewish people and his actions and thought typify the group. An ancestor, in most cases, refers to how a particular group of people sees itself in relation to other nationalities.

It is crucial to see how the malleable Abraham functioned in a world that was continually shaped by Greco-Roman culture and Roman power. Louis Feldman and others have shown that Josephus and perhaps other Hellenistic-Jewish writers used the figure of Abraham to situate the Jewish nation in the midst of a more complex set of cultural dynamics.¹⁰³ This is found in most Intertestamental literature where the Praise of Ancestors is so prominent. The epic on the Praise of Ancestors¹⁰⁴ is modeled after the Greek encomium that makes use of Jewish history and righteous heroes from the past. Included among the literary genres of the Jewish historiography in the Hellenistic period is a category known as the encomium, or praise of the pious heroes.¹⁰⁵

In Sirach 44–50 we encounter an encomium known as the praise of the pious heroes that surveys Jewish history. This Greek form originated in the eulogy delivered at funerals and consisted of praise of deceased heroes.¹⁰⁶ As the form developed and was used in a variety of religious and social settings, it became a panegyric of human saints and heroes as well as cities. When the Jews went into Diaspora, they were no doubt exposed to this form of eulogy, and adopted it to speak of their founding fathers such as Abraham and Moses.

Historiography was a highly valued literary form in Greece. Greek historians of note—including Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E., Hecataeus of Miletus at the end of the fourth century B.C.E., and Diodorus of Sicily in the first century B.C.E.—employed historiography as a way of retelling ancient traditions. Especially valued among the Greeks was the antiquity of a people. Nations that came under Greek influence during the Hellenistic period often composed their own

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ On the treatment of Abraham as a cultural hero and ancestor, see Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 223–8.

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion on the encomium, see Thomas Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1987), 137–45.

¹⁰⁵ Theodore C. Bueges, *Epideictic Literature* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1987), 46.

¹⁰⁶ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 98.

histories in order to establish the prestige of their cultures. Thus, when we read books of the Intertestamental period we should not overlook the importance of encomium. For example, Ben Sira makes this effort in his encomium that traces Jewish history from the origins of humanity to his present time focusing on the noble heroes of Judaism.

The encomium belongs to epideictic literature which, according to Aristotle, is one of the following major types of rhetorical presentation: deliberative, forensic, and epideictic (*Rhet.* 1.3.3). The first three have different social settings: the assembly, the courtroom, and the ordinary audience. Epideictic oratory referred to speeches in which the rhetor sought to impress, rather than to persuade, his audience. In Ben Sira's example, the audience is a Jewish one, presumably assembled during a festival celebrated in a Synagogue. Ben Sira extols the heroes of Jewish history whose great deeds and deep-seated piety helped shape and promulgate the chosen people.¹⁰⁷ Thus, he encases Jewish history in elegant language to laud the great accomplishments and esteemed virtues of his pious and noble ancestors. These ancestors include Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Phinehas, Johua, Caleb, the Judges, Samuel, Nathan, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Joshua, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, The Twelve Prophets, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Joseph, Shem, Seth, Enosh, Adam, and Simon. By tracing Israel's history back to the beginning of time, Ben Sira sought to extol the glories of his people within a Hellenistic world that highly valued the antiquity of an ethnos.

Ben Sira (and his Hellenistic contemporaries) excludes, for the most part, any disgraceful qualities these ancestors might have possessed. He focuses instead on the heroes' qualities which enhanced their character, deeds, and prestige.¹⁰⁸ He at times engages in a revisionist, romanticized history in order to praise past ancestors whom he depicts as pious, righteous, faithful, honored, and thus to be remembered. In his view, ancestors will be remembered for all time because of their deeds and virtues. In eliminating any stain from the character of these heroes, Ben Sira makes no reference to their sins, save in a very general way.

Ben Sira's encomium opens with the sage's call to worship (44:1), followed by a proem (v. 2–14). An accounting of the heroes who performed righteous and noble deeds in Israel's history then follows.

¹⁰⁷ Lee, 44–50, 84.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 206.

Theologically speaking, this structure reveals a movement from creation, to history, to the temple service and the grandeur of the high priest Simon II.¹⁰⁹ The grand finale is the description of the high priest during the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival brings to culmination the order of creation and history for Judah and the nations. To participate in the Feast of Tabernacles is to participate in the final actualization of the salvific order of creation and history, not just of Israel, but of all peoples. Thus, the preceding creation hymn and this recounting of the praise of the pious ancestors are integrally connected into one grand mythic scheme of creation, history, and fulfillment in the Feast of Tabernacles in the temple. The glory of creation now is shared by the heroes of Israel who led to the fulfillment of the salvific order of creation history. Thus, the Praise of Ancestors is idealistic and is used to trace the history of Israel through great leaders both at home and in the Diaspora.

Abraham was recognized as the ancestor or progenitor of the Jews, the harbinger of an ethnos. The people, in turn, are identified as the seed of Abraham.¹¹⁰ To belong to the descendents of Abraham was a mark of distinction; it meant to belong to the people whom God had chosen. Of course, this view of Abraham as the ancestor of the Jewish people is older than Philo and Josephus, having its roots in wisdom and apocalyptic literature. The writer of the *Psalms of Solomon* puts it well when he says: "You are God and we are the people whom you have loved, for you chose the descendents of Abraham above all the nations" (9:8–9). These Jews were the heirs of God's promises (Sir 44:21), the people with whom God would keep his covenant (2 Esd 3:13–5).

In essence, descent from Abraham provided the Jews with a cultural mark of identity.¹¹¹ The Jews in Diaspora eagerly presented themselves as children of Abraham. In doing so they recalled legends about their

¹⁰⁹ Burton Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1987), 189–93. Mack argues that the hymn on creation and the Praise of the Pious belong together: "Now I will remember God's works/praise pious men." Both literary pieces are held together by the theme of the revelation of "glory." In addition, each of the introductory poems refers to the importance of ancestors.

¹¹⁰ The phrase *sperma Abraam* is featured in John 8: 31–59 and also in 2 Cor 11: 22 as an identity marker of Paul's opponents. This *sperma Abraam* designation can be added to the profile of the Pauline corpus and can also be seen in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 44.

¹¹¹ Halvor Moxnes, "God and His Promise to Abraham: First Century Appropriations," in *Theology in Conflict: Studies in Paul's Understanding of God in Romans*, NovTSup (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 117–206.

heroic ancestor as harbingers of culture. The Hellenistic-Jewish authors sought to contextualize Abraham within a Greco-Roman cultural context into which Judaism was integrated and yet remained distinctive, even after the failure of the first Jewish revolt. In consonance with the Greco-Roman pagan sources, the Jews viewed Abraham as a wise astronomer and astrologer (*Jub.* 12:16–7), and a profound philosopher who defended monotheism in the face of idolatry (*Jub.* 16–7; 12:1–5; *Apoc. Ab.* 1:1–8:6).

Hellenism was not a monolithic culture, and the expansion and consolidation of the Augustan imperial power wrought significant changes in the cultural fabric of the Greco-Roman world, including in the religio-cultural and socio-political circumstances of the Jews. In elevating and identifying with Abraham, the Jews identified themselves as a group with a religious heritage. They were the special people of the creator of the universe. Abraham, like Aeneas, became a figure covering the past, present, and the future.

Abraham was a figure from Israel's past, and the past is not a neutral zone but an arena for vigorous contest over the status and identity of groups.¹¹² In elevating Abraham as an ancestor of faith, Paul enters the battleground of ancestor veneration. We must stress that Paul is not overlooking people's traditions;¹¹³ rather, he brings each culture into perspective. Thus he honors all ancestral traditions, but moves further to talk of Abraham as a spiritual ancestor of all people. A crucial issue in considering Abraham as a spiritual ancestor in Romans 4 is the extent to which Paul creatively defines the figure from Israel's past to recategorize all peoples of the world into a new community. This recategorization does not destroy a people's culture; rather, the culture is enriched if people emulate the faith of the founding father.¹¹⁴ Before we explore the issue of faith, it is crucial for us to examine the portrayal of Abraham in both Intertestamental and early pre-Christian sources.

¹¹² Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 175.

¹¹³ 'Tradition' in this book refers to that which has been handed down from founding fathers. This tradition not only conserves the past, but is a force for innovation, and can be reinterpreted and revived in new social, cultural, and historical contexts.

¹¹⁴ In this respect my reading of Abraham in Romans 4 differs from that of Daniel Boyarin who posits a new social identity through the erasure of ethnic and cultural particularity.

Abraham In Intertestamental Literature

Intertestamental literature gives evidence of the early development of a tradition in which Jewish heroes were elevated and praised in cultural, religious, and idealistic terms.¹¹⁵ Jewish intellectuals creatively adapted the encomium from the Greco-Roman world to accomplish this. I contend that Intertestamental literature was written to demonstrate to the Greco-Roman world that Israel's ancestors surpassed those of other nations, including Greeks and Romans.¹¹⁶ The biblical Abraham is transformed into an ideal (impressionable) figure, who serves as a model for Israel and other nations to emulate. It is unthinkable that any Jew in either Palestine or the Diaspora was unaware of Abraham's faith. Two historical crises easily provide points of demarcation: the Maccabean revolt and the Jewish war of 66–70 C.E. The political situations surrounding these crises seem to account for much of the direction the interpretation of Abraham took during the Intertestamental period.

Here we will seek to investigate the place and function of Abraham. The statement about Abraham is part of a larger unit, which comprises the "Praise of the Famous" (Sir 44:1–50:21), which catalogues Israel's heroes in terms of paradigms. These paradigms or ideals serve a didactic purpose by setting up ideal models for the Jewish people to emulate.¹¹⁷ In this section we discover an acknowledgement of Abraham's fame and his respect of the law. In Sirach 44:19 the account states: "Great Abraham was the father of many nations; no one has ever been found to equal him in fame."

The notion of Abraham as the "father of many nations" comes from Genesis 17:4. This designation sets Abraham above other heroes such as Enoch and Noah, even though they serve as examples of repentance and perfection (Sir 44:16–8). The basis of Abraham's fame is offered in 44:20–1:

¹¹⁵ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), xxi–xxxiv.

¹¹⁶ Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 82–3.

¹¹⁷ Robert T. Siebeneck, "May Their Bones Return to Life: Sirach's Praise of the Fathers," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (October 1959): 411–28. Siebeneck finds the paradigm motif in 46:12 and 49:10, in which Ben Sira hopes for the resurrection of Israel's heroes in the lives of the present leaders.

He kept the law of the Most High; he entered into covenant with him, setting upon his body the mark of the covenant; and, when he was tested, he proved faithful. Therefore, the Lord swore an oath to him that nations should find blessing through his descendants.¹¹⁸

Thus, Abraham is declared famous on account of God's oath of blessing.¹¹⁹ In chapters 44–50 of Ben Sira, we discover that Abraham is praised as a man of piety, and figures with the heroes of Israel from Adam and Enoch to the high priest Simon II, a contemporary of Ben Sira. In fact, Abraham is portrayed as the figure who kept the law of the Most High and was in covenant with him. The whole notion revolves around Abraham's faith and obedience to God. Ben Sira 44:19–20 makes clear reference to Abraham's testing in Genesis 22, which resulted in the reaffirmation of the covenant promise. The idea that Abraham kept the law probably means that he kept the Mosaic law. The English translation, "the law of the Most high," is based on the Greek νόμον ὑψίστου. The keeping of the law might refer to Abraham's obedience to God's commandments, statutes, and his law. This statement may reflect an early attempt to associate Abraham with the Mosaic law since these terms are frequently used in the Pentateuch to refer to the Mosaic ordinances. Since the commandments and the law were viewed as synonymous in Ben Sira's day, identifying Abraham with the law could easily be derived from such a statement.

An important theme related to Ben Sira is found in *Jubilees* 22:10–30. *Jubilees* (75–50 B.C.E.), or the Little Genesis, retells the biblical stories from creation to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.¹²⁰ For the author of *Jubilees*, fidelity to the stipulations of the covenant was essential in maintaining a relationship with God. Here we find Abraham functioning as one who keeps the norms that will establish the Jews as a nation. In fact, Abraham functions as a "prototype"¹²¹ and spokesperson for the Jews who were fighting for their nationalistic

¹¹⁸ All quotations from the Wisdom of Ben Sira are from Snaith's translation.

¹¹⁹ Thierry Maertens views the ideal Abraham in terms of the paternity of Abraham. Abraham is great in that he is the progenitor of nations (Gentiles) in general and of Israel in particular. He accomplishes this through keeping the law, being circumcised, and being faithful in testing.

¹²⁰ In addition to these titles, *Jubilees* is also known by the titles *The Apocalypse of Moses*, *The Testament of Moses*, *The Book of Adam's Daughters*, and *The Life of Adam*. See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansion of the Old Testament and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 920–34.

¹²¹ 'Prototype' in this book refers to the ideal figure of a nation.

rights. The author of *Jubilees* constructs the life of Abraham in terms of paradigms. Abraham is presented as an ideal figure, whose image serves as a pattern for the Jews. The paradigms are of two kinds, namely nomistic and nonnomistic. In *Jubilees* 20:1–13, Abraham instructs his immediate descendants, Isaac and Jacob, to live faithfully with their God: “But worship the Most High God, and bow down to him continually, and hope for his countenance always, and do what is upright and righteous before him.” Here, again, the notion of Abraham as an ancestor is poignant.

In *Jubilees* 11:14–12:31, Abraham is portrayed as a pious figure. The author begins with an attempt to magnify Abraham’s fame in the land of Chaldea.¹²² In 11:18–24, the author records a legend of Abraham’s childhood in which he fights off a pestilence of crows. The purpose of the account is to declare the fame that Abraham earned while in Chaldea. The account closes with Abraham teaching the people about plowing. The legend is retold in different versions to emphasize Abraham’s greatness. Not only that, but Abraham is also presented as a hero to those who were attacking him.¹²³

According to *Jubilees* 11:11–3, the pestilence of the crows is attributed to the work of Mastema, the devil. Abraham’s victory over the crows makes him the victorious hero over the devil. In addition, *Jubilees* emphasizes Abraham’s upright character. The author achieves this partly by eliminating details that might diminish Abraham’s character. For example, in *Jubilees* 13:10 and 16:11, Abraham’s deception of Pharaoh is omitted (cf. Gen. 12:10–20, 20:1–18). Also, in 15:17 *Jubilees* states that Abraham rejoiced rather than laughed (Gen. 17:17) when the angel assured him that he would have a son.

Abraham’s endurance of trials is emphasized in *Jubilees*. The author declares that, with the sacrifice of Isaac and the death of Sarah, Abraham had endured ten trials (*Jub.* 17:15–8; 19:4–9).¹²⁴ The account states that Abraham was patient and self-controlled, because he was faithful and loved God. As a result of his patient spirit he is declared the friend of the Lord. Repeated also in *Jubilees* is the idea of Abraham’s knowledge of the law (*Jub.* 11:11–3, 12:25–7). The author of

¹²² *Jub.* 11:14–7, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 78–9.

¹²³ S. P. Brock, “Abraham and the Ravens: A Syriac Counterpart to *Jubilees* 11–12 and Its Implications,” *Journal of the Study of Judaism* 9 (December 1978): 135–52.

¹²⁴ The tradition of the ten tests of Abraham is similar to a later tradition of the ten trials of Israel, which is derived from Numbers 14:22.

Jubilees makes Abraham a student of the law, since the angel taught him Hebrew, which enabled him to study his father's books. The "books of the fathers" refers to the books of the law belonging to Enoch and Noah. Enoch is said to be the first to write a book of the laws of heaven (*Jub.* 4:17–8).

Jubilees presents Abraham as an ideal Jew in the sense that he was perfectly trained in the law. Furthermore, *Jubilees* teaches that certain laws came into existence because of Abraham's actions. In particular, Abraham is responsible for the laws of circumcision (*Jub.* 15:3–4), tithing (*Jub.* 13:25–7), and the feast of Booths (*Jub.* 16:20–37).¹²⁵ It is intriguing to note that *Jubilees*' account of Abraham's circumcision closely follows the account in Genesis 17:9–14. In short, Abraham is the center of everything that describes the nation of Israel, and as such deserves emulation.

That Abraham's life is consistent with the law is also seen in Abraham's refusal to participate in idolatry. *Jubilees* emphasizes this in the legendary material of Abraham's childhood. Abraham turns from his father's idols at the age of fourteen (*Jub.* 11:16–7). His zeal against idolatry leads him to burn his father's house of idols (*Jub.* 12:12–4).¹²⁶ Here again we encounter Abraham as a paradigm of teaching the law. In 12:1–8, *Jubilees* includes an account of Abraham exhorting his father against worshipping idols. Abraham argues that idols are void of the spirit, they are mute, and they are made by men's hands; therefore, they cannot help. On this basis he commands: "Do not worship them" (*Jub.* 12:3, 5). In this case Abraham teaches the law against idolatry. He does so by appealing to the law.

Jubilees develops a series of accounts from the end of Abraham's life in which he gives final instructions to his sons. In 20:1–10, Abraham gathers his children and offers his testament. He exhorts his children to live well with others and warns them against fornication and idolatry. Abraham blesses his children and, specifically, Jacob receives three blessings from him. He commands Jacob to be separate from the Gentiles, not eat with them, and abstain from their evil practices. Isaac is also exhorted to keep the commandments and ordinances. In so doing, the author of *Jubilees* portrays Abraham as a father who faith-

¹²⁵ Charlesworth, vol. 2, 84–91.

¹²⁶ The author of *Jubilees* associates the word *Ur* (Gen. 15:7) with the literal rendering "fire." In this legend, Haran dies trying to save the idols from the fire. In later legends, Abraham is placed in a fiery furnace (cf. Dan. 3:1–30).

fully hands down the law to his sons. This is evident in *Jubilees* 21:10, where Abraham acknowledges that he is passing down the traditions of his forefathers, Enoch and Noah. Thus, Abraham serves as the figure of authority who establishes a nation with rules and regulations for right living.

The central message is not the preservation of these traditions. Rather, the emphasis is on the call for the Jews to remember their esteem as a peculiar ethnos. The crisis that preceded the Maccabean revolt posed a threat to Judaism. In an attempt to force Hellenism on the Jewish people (175–67 B.C.E.), Antiochus IV prohibited the Jewish study of the law, worship services, and all rites (1 Macc. 1:37–47). *Jubilees* refer to this crisis in 22:16–7, where the author speaks of a new generation rising up to rebuke the former generation for abandoning the law. Thus, its primary purpose is to persuade the Jews to reestablish their esteem for the law. Abraham fits into the pattern of elevating the law as one of the patriarchs who passes down the law and who exemplifies a life of obedience to the law. His role surpasses even that of the Greek heroes and ancestors. Of all the Jewish patriarchs, Abraham is credited with passing down the main ordinances of the law, including the observance of the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Weeks.¹²⁷

The whole theme of Abraham as an ideal figure is also repeated in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (second century B.C.E.).¹²⁸ In these testaments, Abraham is portrayed as an ideal father. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* give special honor to Abraham as a patriarchal leader of the Jewish people. Sometimes the honor is given to Abraham along with Isaac and Jacob, in the tripatriarchal formula: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These patriarchs will be the first to be resurrected in the messianic age.¹²⁹ In the *Testament of Judah* 17:5, Abraham blesses Judah to become the king of Israel. The Judaic kingship is thus justified on the basis of Abraham's authority. Second, Abraham serves as a model for the Messiah. He is presented as a representative of the messianic prophet.¹³⁰ In summary, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* were a vehicle through which Jewish heroes and pious men were lauded and praised.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 97.

¹²⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, 882–902.

¹²⁹ *T. Jud.* 25:1, *T. Benj.* 10:6–8 (cf. Matt 8:11).

¹³⁰ *T. Levi* 8.1–15.

The *Testaments* reflect a syncretism of Judaism and Hellenism. That influence is seen in part by the Stoic identification of the Law with wisdom and self-control. At the same time, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* also express traditional Jewish values, one of which was the centrality of ancestors. The fact that Abraham is given this important role, while not being the primary subject of the work, witnesses to the strength of the Abrahamic traditions in the Diaspora. Another important source on Abraham's place and role is found in 1 Maccabees (134–100 B.C.E.).¹³¹

The text of 1 Maccabees provides a chronicle of the Maccabean revolt and the early Hasmonian reign. While 1 Maccabees denounces the Jewish-Hellenistic movement (which started during the reign of Antiochus IV and continued through the first century B.C.E.), its central theme is the emulation of Abraham as harbinger of a peculiar ethnos. Interestingly, 1 Maccabees contains a unique reference to the Abrahamic tradition which relates the Jews and Spartans to one another on the basis of descent from Abraham. First Maccabees 12 refers to a letter which Jonathan Ben Mattathias sent to the Spartans to renew an alliance on the basis of an earlier letter sent by King Arius of Sparta to the high priest, Onias I, stating that "you are our brethren."¹³² The letter from Arius to Onias is said to have stated specifically: "It has been found in writing concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brethren and are of the family of Abraham" (12:21). Schuller identifies Arius with Areus I (309–265 B.C.E.) and Onias as Onias I.¹³³

The speech by Mattathias in 2:49–64 establishes Abraham as an example for Israel to follow. The central theme is found in 1 Maccabees 2:51: "Remember the deeds they [the fathers] did in their generation, and great glory and eternal fame shall be yours." The paradigm points to Abraham as one of the famous patriarchs who demonstrated zeal for the law. Abraham is first in the roll call of the faithful fathers. His faithfulness is described in terms of his perseverance under trial:

¹³¹ *New Revised Standard Version*.

¹³² Erich Gruen, "Fact and Fiction: Jewish Legends in a Hellenistic Context," in Paul Cartledge, Peter Garnsey, and Erich Gruen, eds., *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History, and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 74–5.

¹³³ S. Schuller, "Some Problems Connected with the Supposed Common Ancestry of Jews and Spartans and their Relations during the Last Three Centuries B.C.," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 257.

“Did not Abraham prove steadfast under trial, and so gain credit as a righteous man?” (1 Macc. 2:52). This statement interprets Gen. 15:6 (καί ἐλογίσθη αὐτότῳ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, LXX) in light of the account of the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1–19), understood as temptation narrative. Abraham is declared to be righteous simply because he obeyed God when he was tested.

In Maccabees we come face to face with the conflict between two cultures, where one intends to upset the cultural and traditional beliefs of the other. The author views Antiochus IV as a representative of Hellenism in his efforts to abolish the practice of the law (1:41–50). In this case, two issues deserve our attention. First, the conflict between Hellenism and Jews gives the law a nationalistic character. Second, Abraham himself becomes a cultural, traditional, and national figure who typifies the Jewish ethnos. In 1 Maccabees Abraham is associated with the law because he is the exemplary patriarch of the Jewish nation.

Thus, it appears that in the historical period beginning with the Maccabean struggle and ending with the conclusion of the Jewish War, the Abraham tradition received new dimensions of emphasis while still retaining continuity with the Genesis narrative. In both Palestine and the Diaspora, Abraham was perceived as an ancestor of the Jews. He is presented as the perfect example of a Torah-keeping Jew, with considerable emphasis on his faithfulness when tested.¹³⁴ In the Hellenistic Diaspora, Abraham is at the forefront of a series of ancient biblical heroes of faith and is a model to the readers.¹³⁵ In a time when faithfulness to the Torah, loyalty to the one God of Israel, and a newly deepened historical self-consciousness were pressing realities of decision and life, those who “searched the scriptures” found in the father of the people a model for the contemporary situation.

Another document of interest is the *Biblical Antiquities of Pseudo-Philo* (first century C.E.). Some of the motifs in this text are found in other writings. Abraham’s birth is prophesied in 4:11 as “*perfectus vocabitur et immaculatus, et pater gentum erit, et no dissolvetur*

¹³⁴ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 232.

¹³⁵ This point is perfectly illustrated in the three Hellenistic Jewish sermons found in the Cairo Geniza, in *Hellenistisch judische Predigten*, ed., Folker Siegert Drei (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 46–67. The most important of these sermons is the one on Abraham and Joseph.

*testamentum eius, et semen eius in speculum multiplicatur.*¹³⁶ Here again we encounter the theme of Abraham's fatherhood to the nations. Related to this is also the portrayal of Abraham in the *Testament of Abraham*.¹³⁷ He is portrayed as gentle, just, peaceable, and exceedingly hospitable.¹³⁸ In this text, God sends Michael, the angel of death, to Abraham to inform him of his approaching death. Again, Abraham becomes the ancestor in this scenario. He was the first to be told of his death and the first to be allowed to go to heaven before he died.

In Enoch 3:15 we learn that Abraham was the first to receive a vision of the seven heavens, the earth, the garden of Eden, and the whole course of human history from Adam to the Messiah.¹³⁹ In most of the Intertestamental literature, Abraham is portrayed as the ancestor who embodied the whole Jewish law, the Jewish culture and, most importantly, faith in one God. These virtues will be dealt with more fully in our discussion of Philo and Josephus. Now that we have established the existence of the Abrahamic traditions in the Greco-Roman world, we need to examine another body of literature that arose in the first Christian century. In this work I will focus primarily on Philo, 4 Maccabees, Josephus, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Testament of Abraham*.

Philo's Portrait of Abraham

Our concern is not to delineate all the traditions and portraits of Abraham as they appear in Philo. Rather, our focus will be on how Philo presents Abraham as an ancestor figure of Jews at home and in Diaspora. Philo was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. He lived approximately between 30 B.C.E. and 50 C.E. His writings represent Alexandrian Judaism. Hence, his portrayal of Abraham as an ancestor greatly sheds light on how people thought of Abraham in the midst of Greeks, Romans, and Jews. Philo's *De*

¹³⁶ Translated, these words are: "and he shall be perfect, and undefiled, and he shall be the father of nations, and his covenant shall not be broken, and his seed shall be multiplied for ever." In M. R. James, trans., *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1971), 85.

¹³⁷ E. P. Sanders, trans., *T. Abr. 1.1–3, Recension A*, in James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1, 882.

¹³⁸ George W. E. Nicklesburg, Jr., ed., *Studies on the Testament of Abraham: Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 6 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 165.

¹³⁹ Charlesworth, ed., vol. 1, 249.

Abrahamo is aimed above all to outline a model for the ideal ancestor. We must note that Philo's work reflects a unique blend of Jewish and Greek thought. Philo's mission was to idealize Abraham, and thus present him as the epitome of a cultural ancestor. As a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, Philo portrays Abraham's life on two levels. First, he tells the life of Abraham as an historical figure by paraphrasing the LXX. Second, he represents Abraham's life as an allegory of Jewish piety using the Greek genre of historiography.

When reading Philo's work, one is struck by his 'Jewishness,' which he guarded with utmost concern and care. In the words of Peder Borgen, Philo's Jewishness is evident in his loyalty to the Jewish institutions and laws of Moses, his position on the role of Israel as the priesthood of the world, and his harshness against renegades.¹⁴⁰ Philo ascribes to Abraham what he calls "virtues."¹⁴¹ These virtues represent Jewish ideals as told through Stoic and Neoplatonic concepts. Philo develops his allegorical account of Abraham's neotic progress by following the stages of the biblical narrative. For Philo, Abraham was a wise man who was made perfect through teachings of the law.¹⁴² Thus, Philo uses the story of Abraham to address the virtue of knowledge. Through typology he portrays Abraham's experience as a progression in knowledge by which Abraham moves through definite stages of intelligence.¹⁴³ Philo emphasizes Abraham's wandering from Chaldaea to Haran, and allegorically this meant that Abraham advanced from material to spiritual knowledge (*Migr.* 192).

Philo also associates Abraham's advance in reason with the change of Abraham's name. He states that Abraham's new name means "elect father of sound" or "uplifted father" (*Abr.* 81–4, *Mut.* 69–76). Here Abraham is transformed into a higher figure who surpasses even Greek heroes. This new order is called sound—the source of outward reasoning. Philo also charts Abraham's progress toward knowledge by

¹⁴⁰ Peder Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria," *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism: Jewish Writings* (New York: Continuum Intl. Pub. Group, 1998), 233.

¹⁴¹ Philo's ideas were greatly influenced by his allegiance to Platonism and the particular worldview with which he was in dialogue. For this elaboration see Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Middle Platonism in Transition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 9–20. See also John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 149–51.

¹⁴² *Philo on Abraham*, 1.68.

¹⁴³ *Abr.* 57–8, 70; *Migr.* 13, and *Migr.* 194–6. Philo describes knowledge as a self-awakening experience by which one enters a new state of insight.

analyzing Abraham's relationship with Hagar, and Abraham's vision of the three angels. Related to this is also the notion of Abraham as a wise philosopher. In Philo, Abraham is the ideal wise man, who first searched for God (*Abr.* 68). He is not only a wise man but also a world citizen (*Migr.* 59) and a philosopher-king (*Abr.* 261, *Mut.* 151–3, *Somn.* 2.244).¹⁴⁴ In Philo we see Abraham emerging as a middle Platonist sage similar to Greek and Roman philosophers.¹⁴⁵

Next to these virtues is the virtue of piety. Philo views piety as the greatest virtue (*Abr.* 60–1). Abraham's piety includes his love for, and obedience toward, God (*Abr.* 170, 192). This piety is further demonstrated in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac (*Abr.* 167–207), his prayer for God's intervention against Pharaoh (*Abr.* 93–8), and his hospitality towards the angelic visitors (*Abr.* 114–6).¹⁴⁶ Philo sees piety and faith as two complimentary virtues found in Abraham, and this is crucial to our reading of Abraham as a faith ancestor. He defines faith (πίστις) as trusting in God's future provision, as if it were already a reality. In *Migr.* 44, we find the following:

For the soul, clinging in utter dependence on a good hope and deeming that things not present are beyond question already present by reason of the sure steadfastness of Him that promised them, has won as its meed faith, a perfect good; for we read a little later "Abraham believed God."¹⁴⁷

Thus, faith means a hope that clings to God's faithfulness. In the words of Philo, "faith in God is the one safe and infallible good. It is the consolation of life, the fulfillment of bright hopes, the death of ills, the harvest of goods, the acquaintance with piety, and the heritage of happiness. It is the all-round betterment of the soul firmly fastened on God."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 57. A philosopher-king's laws are an extension of nature. As a divine entity the king possesses knowledge of the divine will of nature.

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion on Platonism see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 135–9. Dillon argues that Philo is the chief representative of Middle Platonism.

¹⁴⁶ For an elaboration of this virtue see, J. T. A. G. M. Van Ruitten, "Abraham, Job and the Book of Jubilees," in Eibert Tigchelaar and Ed Noort, eds., *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 62.

¹⁴⁷ *Migr.* 44.

¹⁴⁸ Philo, *On the Life of Abraham*, 267.

Abraham is portrayed as a person who believed in God. In *Quis Heres* 90–3, Philo describes Abraham's faith as being "unalloyed trust" in God. In this case, he defines faith as utter dependence on God, as trusting God without any reliance on the material order. In this case he views faith not only as a positive trust in God but also as disgust for the material order. In Genesis 24:1 in the LXX, Abraham is the first to be called an elder, a quality which Philo creatively used to contrast Abraham with ordinary human beings. Philo presents Abraham as the first person who surpassed all humans in divine endowments and in achievements, and his capacities bring benefits to the universe.¹⁴⁹ In essence, the Abraham we encounter in Philo was the first to possess faith. Faith makes Abraham the harbinger of God's ethnos. Thus, God holds Abraham's faith in high esteem and repays this faith with divine faith; He confirms by an oath the gifts already promised. God's oath is a measure of faith added to that faith which Abraham antecedently possessed.¹⁵⁰

The prominence of Abraham's faith is seen in the way God bestowed favor on Abraham. Unlike his encounters with Enoch and Moses, God addresses Abraham intimately. Touched and encountered by the Abraham's faith, God addresses him as a friend would address an acquaintance (*Abr.* 273). Abraham is not only pre-eminent among men, but his eminence is such that God converses with him in fictive kinship terms. God's promises are met with Abraham's faith or trust. Thus, when humanity encounters God's promises, they should trust in them most firmly. The first of this human race was Abraham, the one who deserves to be harbinger of a new nation. Moses obeyed the law, but Abraham was the embodiment of the law.

The greatness of faith or trust in God lies primarily in its object. In contrast with the material order, "this object is utterly reliable, a firm foundation upon which to build, the source of all good."¹⁵¹ However, in *Abr.* 268, Philo defines faith as a work which results from God's providential protection and prosperity. Thus, Abraham exhibits this greatest virtue: "the greatness of faith is to be found in its subject as well as its object."¹⁵² Clearly, Philo views Abraham as a model of faith.

¹⁴⁹ Sandmel, 140.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, a continuum imprint (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 250–1.

¹⁵² Ibid., 251.

This faith encompasses trust in God, belief in God's existence, and attainment of a blessed life. Not only that, but Philo views Abraham as the ideal proselyte,¹⁵³ because he is the first to have faith in God (*Virt.* 211–5). In the words of Francis Watson, “the classic instance of Abraham’s heroic and unwavering trust in the invisible and distrust for the visible is to be found in his offering of his son in obedience to the divine command, after which the promise was confirmed by a divine oath because God himself marveled at Abraham’s faith in him” (*Virt.* 273).¹⁵⁴ Thus, Moses’s inspired statement about his faith is a written commendation of Abraham himself (*Abr.* 262). Therefore, to emulate and glorify Abraham is to enhance the glory of God, and not to detract from it.

Abraham’s life can be summed up in the following statement: “Abraham believed in God.” This was not just a one-time event but occurred throughout his life. God was the object of his constant trust. Abraham became the recipient of God’s promises, the beneficiary of the future divine saving action, of which he was promised, because that promise was divinely ordained of God and therefore credible and irrevocable. Thus, the divine promise insistently shaped and molded his life by setting it in the light of the world’s eschatological future. Abraham’s response to the promise is a model to his followers. His *fides* was directed toward God, the divine benefactor. Faith then becomes the doorway to religion, for without faith true religion cannot develop. It is man’s initial awareness of God and also a continuing attitude of personal trust in God.

Related to faith is the notion of Abraham as an ethical figure. Philo describes Abraham’s ethical practice in terms of the Stoic cardinal virtues of justice, bravery, prudence, and temperance.¹⁵⁵ He finds these virtues in the accounts of Abraham’s separation from Lot (*Abr.* 208–24), Abraham’s victory over the kings (*Abr.* 225–44), and Abraham’s acceptance of Sarah’s death without grief (*Abr.* 245, 255–61). Philo interprets Abraham’s victory over the kings as an allegory, indicating that Abraham conquered all of his physical passions.

¹⁵³ Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 727–31, 739. In this work, ‘proselyte’ is defined as a new creature whose former pagan life no longer exists, and he will not be punished for transgressions of the Torah at that time.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria*, 59.

In Philo, Abraham personifies the law. Because the law did not exist during Abraham's time, the stories of Abraham and the other patriarchs were used to teach the law; people learned the law through the example of the patriarchs' behavior.¹⁵⁶ In this sense, Philo's emphasis on Abraham's virtue is an emphasis on Abraham's lawful character. Writing for both Jewish and Hellenistic audiences, Philo believes that stories about the patriarchs are meant to encourage adherence to the law. Could this then be an apologetic motif on Philo's part? This is probable because Philo is appealing to the Romans and the Alexandrians to accept the validity of Judaism as a religious/philosophical system, at a time when Jewish rights were under strain.¹⁵⁷ He does so by representing the law in terms of the Stoic law of nature and Platonic idealism.¹⁵⁸ Thus, Philo presents Abraham as one who kept the unwritten law of nature. Because the ideal law is an archetype of the Sinaitic law, Abraham's actions serve as a model, calling the *ethnos* to emulate the founding father.

In eulogizing and praising the Jewish founders, Philo wrote the following:

These are such men as lived good and blameless lives, whose virtues stand permanently recorded in the most holy Scriptures, not merely to sound their praises but for the instruction of the reader and as an inducement to him to aspire to the same; for in these men we have laws endowed with life and reason, and Moses extolled them for two reasons.¹⁵⁹

The principle reason Philo presents Abraham is to encourage Jews to emulate their founder both in conduct and in faith. In *Abr.* 5, Philo states that the stories of the patriarchs were included in the Pentateuch to show that the law is consistent with nature and that it is not too difficult to keep.

¹⁵⁶ Philo indicates that he knew of a tradition based on Gen. 26:5 which taught that Abraham kept the Sinaitic Law. However, in *Abr.* 276 he refutes this teaching, arguing that Abraham personifies the intent of the law as an unwritten law, rather than the earthly law.

¹⁵⁷ Erwin R. Goodenough, *Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 52–74.

¹⁵⁸ Philo seems to suggest that the law of nature remains superior to the written law, in that the earthly copy can never match the heavenly one.

¹⁵⁹ Philo, *On the Life of Abraham*, 1.4–5.

Second, Philo views Abraham through a “Hellenistic garb for a judiciously selected apologetic occasion.”¹⁶⁰ This double presentation serves both of Philo’s audiences, namely Greco-Romans and Hellenistic Jews. In the apologetic sense, Abraham is transformed from a sage into a faith figure, one who is in full possession of his faith. His faith or trust in God is the mark of his piety and firmly roots him in God. This transformation is a divine gift, which moves God to claim Abraham as his partner in divine matters. In a word, Abraham travels the road of faith.

While we find faith in Abraham, we also discover that, as a friend of God, he received the gift of wisdom—a quality Philo appropriated from Greek and Roman philosophy to elevate Abraham above Roman emperors and heroes. In Sandmel’s words, “Abraham, as a prophet and friend of God, passes beyond the bounds of human happiness. He becomes nobly born, registering God as his father and becoming by adoption His only son, and thus achieves divine wisdom.”¹⁶¹

In other words, the *sophia* of God was apprehended by Abraham, and when his soul encountered God’s presence, God did not turn away but in his love of this virtue-loving soul, God came forward to meet with him and Abraham encountered God’s nature. This is what God saw in Abraham, and reckoned it to him as righteousness. In Philo we find Abraham portrayed as the beneficiary of God’s power, thus making him the founder of a higher order.

We now turn to 4 Maccabees (first century C.E.),¹⁶² which contains some striking similarities to Philo’s presentation of Abraham. The text of 4 Maccabees attempts to make a rational appeal for the piety of Judaism. It is part of the wisdom literature tradition in that it appeals to the wisdom of being faithful to the law. Moses Hadas states that the theme of the work is the elevation of reason over the passions. This theme is repeated throughout the work (cf. 4 Maccabees 1:7, 9, 13, 19).¹⁶³ However, W. H. Brownlee points out that 4 Maccabees often defines reason as religious wisdom (4 Macc. 1:1, 7; 16:13, and 1:15–23);

¹⁶⁰ Samuel Sandmel, *Philo’s Place in Judaism: A Study of the Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1956), 107.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 178–9.

¹⁶² See H. Anderson, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 531.

¹⁶³ Moses Hadas, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees*, Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning: *Jewish Apocryphal Literature*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 91–2.

the source and essence of this wisdom is piety (4 Macc. 7:4, 23), which attempts to present the law as the most authentic expression of true philosophy (4 Macc. 1:16–7).

In 4 Maccabees Abraham serves a model of piety. His descendants are supposed to be the ideal Jews who practice piety toward the law. In 4 Maccabees 9:22, the term “son of Abraham”¹⁶⁴ refers to one who exhibits piety toward the law. This piety is expressed as a willingness to be martyred for the sake of the law. In most cases, the term “son of Abraham” would draw attention to Abraham’s character as the model for piety. However, in 4 Maccabees the model is not Abraham but Isaac, who allowed himself to be offered as a sacrifice for the sake of piety (4 Macc. 13:12, 18:11)¹⁶⁵ Isaac is commended for offering himself as a true “son of Abraham, who uttered not a groan” (4 Macc. 9:21; cf. 16:20). As the son of promise, Isaac instructs his brothers to imitate his actions and die for the sake of their religion (4 Macc. 9:23). When the brothers die, their eulogy recalls Isaac’s willingness to be sacrificed for piety’s sake (4 Macc. 13:12). Both Abraham and Isaac are examples of true piety. Thus, Abraham fits into the paradigm motif as the father of descendants who are faithful to the law. His piety is reflected in Isaac, the ideal son, and in descendants who are like Isaac. Abraham’s devotion to piety is also seen in his bravery in offering his son as a sacrifice.

Pseudo-Philo Antiquities (First Century C.E.)

The Book of Biblical Antiquities (*Bib. Ant.*) has been referred to as a midrashic history similar to *Jubilees*, and it relates Israel’s history from the time of creation until the death of Saul. The book has been dated to the first century C.E., following Leopold Cohen, who first introduced the work in 1890. My goal in examining this literature is to explore the portrayal of Abraham and establish ample evidence of the patriarch’s prominence in the Greco-Roman world of the first-century Christian period. The account of Abraham is condensed in this text.

¹⁶⁴ Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 555.

¹⁶⁵ The model is taken from a tradition that interprets Isaac’s silence at the altar (Gen. 22:9–10) as an indication that he accepted his sacrifice without complaint. In *Bib. Ant.* 32:3 we find the same view expressed in a speech attributed to Isaac: “What and if I had not been born in the world to be offered a sacrifice unto him that made me?”

The longest account is found in chapter six, where the legend concerning Abraham's life in Ur is expanded.

It is interesting to note the two ways in which Abraham is presented in *Bib. Ant.* First, he is a fearless character who followed God's commands with trust. Here we find the account combining the story of the Tower of Babel with the legend of Abraham in the fiery furnace.¹⁶⁶ Abraham refused to help build the tower, an indication of his virtuous character as an independent thinker. He is then thrown into a fiery furnace, but God miraculously saves him, and 83,500 of the Chaldeans are killed. This legend showed Abraham to be courageous—a characteristic which greatly appealed to both the Hellas and Jews of the Diaspora. Thus, Abraham is portrayed as an ideal ancestor who sets an example of fearless faith in God. The same theme is found in Deborah's Hymn (*Bib. Ant.* 32:1–4). The hymn begins by recalling how God rescued Abraham from the fiery furnace, followed by the account of the sacrifice of Isaac. The angels are even portrayed as jealous of Abraham as he responds to God's call to sacrifice Isaac. The story established the unwavering faith of Abraham and his loyalty to God. As a result of his actions, Abraham earns a reputation before God, and God promises to silence his enemies (*Bib. Ant.* 32:4).

If the *Bib. Ant.* of Philo was written near the period of the Jewish war (66–70 C.E.), then Abraham's example of fearless faith is meant to encourage the Jews in their struggles against a foreign enemy, namely Rome. In 32:4 we find the following words: "I have shut the mouths of those who are always speaking evil against you." Could this be directed toward the enemies of Abraham's descendants? Surely the work is intended to demonstrate Abraham's courage and faith, and to exhort future generations to always remember the actions of their forefathers.

Second, we find Abraham portrayed as an archetype of the law in that his life is described as being consistent with the prescriptions of the law. His life is the embodiment of an ideal Jew who does not yoke himself to foreigners (*Bib. Ant.* 23:5, 25:9–13, 44:7, 45:3). In *Bib. Ant.* 4:11, Abraham is declared to be blameless and perfect. In contrast to Israel's disobedience, Abraham is established as one who exemplifies the ideals of the law. Thus, his life and covenant take on an archetypal role in relation to the Sinaitic covenant.

¹⁶⁶ The association of Abraham with the fiery furnace and the Tower of Babel is unique to the *Bib. Ant.*

Josephus on Abraham (37–100 C.E.)

Josephus's treatment of Abraham deserves careful scrutiny, since his work differs greatly from Philo and other Jewish Hellenistic authors before him. Josephus portrays Abraham with many Greco-Roman motifs. He paraphrases the biblical accounts, expanding and editing the narratives to meet the needs of his Greco-Roman audience. Josephus minimizes the role of the covenant in order to deemphasize Jewish particularism before his Roman audience.¹⁶⁷ He also omits some of the scriptural portrayals of Abraham, for several reasons. First, by separating Abraham from the law, Josephus was probably appealing to the Romans to accept Judaism culturally and politically, while not requiring them to practice the religion. This raises serious problems because Josephus claims to be a Pharisee, and we know that rabbis associate Abraham with the law. Thus, we can assert that Josephus picks and chooses which aspects of Abraham to emphasize. He does this in order to fit his apologetic and propaganda motifs.¹⁶⁸

Josephus, like other Jewish writers in Diaspora, wanted to make Judaism acceptable to both Greeks and Romans. To accomplish this, Josephus had to portray Abraham as a Greek philosopher and military leader.¹⁶⁹ In *Jewish Antiquities* 1.154, Josephus describes Abraham as a philosopher who makes inferences and participates in rational debates. Not only that, but Abraham was the first to arrive at monotheism. In Josephus's work, "the patriarch emerges as the typical national hero, such as was popular in Hellenistic times, with emphasis on his noble genealogy, his qualities as a convincing speaker, a logician, a philosopher, a scientist, a general, and the supremely good host to strangers."¹⁷⁰

It is not surprising that a variety of early Jewish authors sought to explore the exact nature of Abraham's connection to astronomy, using biblical exegesis and extrabiblical tales to explain how his expertise in

¹⁶⁷ Josephus claims that he neither adds nor deletes anything from Scripture (*Ant.* 1.17, 4.197, 8.56, 10.218), yet he does both. See Attridge, *Interpretation*, 57–60.

¹⁶⁸ For an elaboration of this, see Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 76. However, Sandmel does not find this propaganda motif for Abraham.

¹⁶⁹ Sandmel, in *Philo's Place*, 75, asserts that Josephus suggests that Abraham is a kind of Greek philosopher, but he never develops this concept. Louis H. Feldman argues that Josephus attributes to Abraham what Greek philosophers were claiming to be the ideal qualities of a philosopher, in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 99 (1968): 143–56.

¹⁷⁰ Louis H. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The Portrait of Abraham," 137.

science related to his status as the progenitor of the Jewish nation. In Josephus we discover that Abraham brought culture to both Egypt and Greece. Josephus states that Abraham went to Egypt to debate with the Egyptians on the nature of God (*Ant.* 1.161). After proving his greater intelligence, he taught them arithmetic and astrology, which they passed on to the Greeks (*Ant.* 1.166–8).

Second, Josephus attributes to Abraham military characteristics that would be impressive to his Greco-Roman audience. In *Ant.* 1.159–60, Josephus includes a tradition from Nicolas of Damascus, which states that Abraham invaded Damascus with a large army. The tradition also states that Abraham reigned for some time as a king in Damascus. Not only does Josephus take this from other historians, but he also includes his own portrayal of Abraham's military leadership by inserting military terminology into the account of Abraham's victory over kings (*Ant.* 1.181–2, *Gen.* 14:1–24).

Intriguingly, Josephus views Abraham in militaristic terms, an aspect that is crucial to a postcolonial reader. Josephus describes Abraham's force as Abraham's army (Ἀβράμουν στρατώ) and Abraham's comrades in arms (τοῖς φίλοις τοῖς συστρατευομένοις). This idea originated from the biblical accounts, and is important to the thesis of this study. Josephus greatly emphasizes Abraham's military role. He even includes a reference to Abraham's army in the account of his deception of Pharaoh, and specifies that his army was made up of 318 commanders (ὑπάρχους), each in charge of a large army (*Bello* 5.380).¹⁷¹

Josephus views Abraham as a model of divine providence. He asserts that even though Abraham had a boundless army, he trusted instead in divine providence. Abraham's trust in this providence resulted in his prosperity and Sarah's protection. In his treatment of Abraham's war with the kings (*Ant.* 1.171–82), Josephus speaks against relying on arms rather than God. For Josephus, the account indicates that "victory does not depend on numbers and a multitude of hands" (*Ant.* 1.178), but on God, who delivered Abraham's enemies into his hands (*Ant.* 1.181). Josephus also describes the sacrifice of Isaac as an event where divine providence was displayed. God is described as the divine ally (*Ant.* 1.222–36). Josephus explains Abraham's willingness to make the sacrifice as trust in divine providence: "That in everything he must

¹⁷¹ Josephus's description of Abraham's army is set in the context of Titus's siege of Jerusalem.

submit to His will, since all that befell His favored ones was ordained by his providence" (*Ant.* 1.125). Josephus adds a speech by Abraham in which he tells Isaac to trust in God's will, since God is his "supporter and ally" (*Ant.* 1.229). In any case, we discover that Josephus's portrayal of Abraham is to some extent different from that of Philo and other Hellenistic writers of the same period.

All the traditions described above were intended to exalt Abraham's faith in the One God, and the association between Abraham and astrology functions to assert the patriarch's worthiness of the promise granted to him without explanation in Genesis 12:1–9. In essence, this association does not only elevate Abraham as an ancestor of the Jews, but it also helps to assert and establish the Jewish tradition in the Diaspora. The Jews were not just poor immigrants; rather, they were a people who had a strong founder and a sacred tradition. In consonance with the Greco-Roman appropriation of ancestors, Abraham becomes a competing ancestor in world religious history. In Philo, the ancestor is given a more powerful and positive religious position, one that will set him apart from Greeks and Romans; he becomes a universal ancestor of faith.

In *Ant.* 1.154–68, we encounter Abraham's departure from Mesopotamia and his sojourn to Egypt. Aspects of both astrology and his inference of monotheism are intertwined. Josephus portrays Abraham as "skilful in understanding all things and persuasive to his listeners concerning that which he, without fail, inferred."¹⁷² It is Abraham's intelligence, persuasiveness, and philosophical ability that set the stage for his recognition of One God. Here we encounter Josephus making use of that which the Greeks and Romans valued, namely the notion of being the "first."¹⁷³ Josephus creatively describes the genesis of Abraham's faith in the One God in consonance with his invention of monotheism. The way Abraham arrives at this historical discovery deserves comment as it illuminates Josephus's establishment of Abraham within the Hellenistic cultural context.

In *Ant.* 1.155–6, Josephus wrote the following:

¹⁷² *Ant.* 1.154.

¹⁷³ In *Ant.* 1.154–5, Josephus states that "He [Abraham] was therefore the first who dared to declare that God was the sole Creator of everything and that, if other things contributed something to humankind's happiness, each one supplies something in accordance with His command and not by its own strength."

And he [Abraham] inferred these things from the changes in land and sea that are dependent upon the sun and the moon and all the happenings in heaven. For he said that, if they would have provided for their own orderliness. But, since they lack this, it is evident that as many things as they contribute to our increased usefulness they perform not by their own authority but in accordance with the power of their commander, on whom alone it is proper to confer honor and gratitude.¹⁷⁴

This tractate presents Abraham as a revolutionary religious figure who is not only an astrologer but also a prophet. Josephus uses Gen. 12:10–20 to propose that Abraham invented astronomy and arithmetic for the Egyptians and, consequently, for the Greeks. Cross-culturally, Josephus exploits the narrative gaps in the Genesis account of Abraham's travels in order to contextualize the hero's philosophical prowess, his religious genius, and his status as a cultural hero active on the international stage.

Some scholars have viewed Gen. 12:1–9 and Gen. 12:10–20 as examples of Josephus's efforts to 'hellenize' Abraham as the father of the Jews. Louis Feldman has argued that Josephus uses Hellenistic tropes, models, and literary forms to describe the father of the Jews in terms comprehensible and compelling to a primarily non-Jewish audience.¹⁷⁵ Josephus did this so as to argue for the strength of the Jewish identity. This portrayal of Abraham serves to define Judaism vis-à-vis Greco-Roman culture. Jewish culture may have clashed on occasion with the Greek and Roman cultures. Yet, in most instances, these cultural contacts were immensely fruitful and creative. Some Jews might have been intimidated by Greeks and Romans, but in Josephus we see that some found these cultures attractive, stimulating, and even indispensable. In this case, the Jews borrowed cultural elements from the Greco-Romans and vice versa, and both existed side by side. Identity as a Jew meant maintaining continuity with the tradition of the past, specifically the tradition of the founding fathers.

¹⁷⁴ *Ant.* 1.155–6.

¹⁷⁵ Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 223–89; "Abraham the Greek Philosopher in Josephus," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 99 (1968): 143–56; "Abraham the General in Josephus," in F. E. Greenspahn, E. Hilgart, and B. L. Mack, eds., *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmell* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 78–9; "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The Portrait of Abraham," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. L. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1987), 133–53.

The widespread perception of astronomy¹⁷⁶ as an alien wisdom helped to set Abraham above Greco-Roman ancestors, thus establishing Judaism as a worthy culture within the Greco-Roman world. Here Abraham becomes a founding figure whose wisdom is equal to (or surpasses that of) Greek philosophers. In as much as Josephus and other Jewish writers embrace the view of astronomy as an emblem of extreme antiquity and as a part of humankind's scientific advancement, Abraham here serves to assert both the Jews' place in history and the Jewish contribution to the cosmopolitan culture of the Hellenistic world. In Josephus we discover that Abraham discerns the existence of God and his care for the world from the phenomena of the natural world around him.

Along with astrological wisdom, the founder must be a traveler in search of truth. In Genesis 12:10, Abraham's journey to Egypt is motivated by famine, but Josephus adds a twist to the journey. Abraham is a traveling philosopher who longs to hear what Egyptian culture says about God. As Feldman rightly stresses, Josephus paints Abraham in terms that evoke Greco-Roman ideals of philosophy and wisdom, as exemplified by such figures as Solon.¹⁷⁷ In so far as Feldman focuses on Josephus's portrayal of Abraham, he does not tell us much about how this portrayal was an effort to cross-culturally assert Jewish culture within the Roman Empire. I assert that Abraham's journey to Egypt should be seen not as a desperate move; rather, it was a journey to build relationships with other cultures, and thereby share his faith. Here Abraham is a model of a humble missionary who was at home among foreigners.¹⁷⁸

The fact that Josephus depicts Abraham as willing to convert if he was defeated in an argument¹⁷⁹ meant that he was open to others. The

¹⁷⁶ On the importance of astrology throughout antiquity, see Paul Spilsbury, *The Image of the Jew in Flavius Josephus's Paraphrase of the Bible*, TSAJ 69 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 55–74; *Jubilees* 12:16–8 recounts that Abraham was observing the stars to predict the weather, when he suddenly realized that all celestial phenomena are actually controlled by the One God.

¹⁷⁷ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher," 144–5, 151–2.

¹⁷⁸ Here Abraham can be described as an interdependent missionary, who was willing to convert to other religions if need be. Musa Dube defines interdependence as the interconnectedness of different cultures, economies, and political structures. See Musa W. Dube in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 185–6.

¹⁷⁹ Steve Mason, ed., *Judean Antiquities: Translation and Commentary*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 61, n. 517.

striking aspect in Josephus's portrayal of Abraham in the Egyptian saga is that the hero emerges as someone worth the admiration of Greeks and Romans. In reality, Abraham is embedded in the Hellenistic-Jewish culture. Abraham is a persuasive debater and also a passionate listener; these two characteristics won him the admiration of both Greeks and Romans. His willingness to engage his God with the gods of other cultures puts Abraham above renowned Hellenistic philosophers. Josephus has a whole tractate in which he refers to Abraham as a convincing teacher who was able to persuade his hearers on any subject.¹⁸⁰

We can infer from this portrayal that Abraham's journey to Egypt was motivated by mission. Thus Abraham becomes a proselytizing figure whose ideas about God were well received by the Egyptians. His journey of inquiry leads him to learn from the Egyptians priests like a student in a philosophical school. Feldman observes that one of the "recurrent characteristics of the pre-Socratic philosophers as viewed in Hellenistic times, is that they visited Egypt to become acquainted with Egyptian science and other esoteric lore and to engage in discussions with Egyptian wise men."¹⁸¹ In this sense, Abraham is a true missionary;¹⁸² what he believes about God depends upon his experience with nature and astronomy. In some cases, Abraham is referred to as the father of the proselytes because of his power of persuasion and argumentation.¹⁸³

In presenting Abraham as a Hellenistic philosopher, Josephus may be introducing an ancient ancestor of the Jews who stands at the foundation of history. Josephus's Abraham excels in all major Hellenistic-Greek cultural areas including rhetoric, philosophy, and science.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ *Ant.* 1.165–8. See Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 'Abraham,' where Josephus describes Abraham's interactions in Egypt as the head of one school of Hellenistic philosophy disputing with the head of a rival school, 230.

¹⁸¹ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher in Josephus," *TAPA* 99 (1968): 151.

¹⁸² Abraham's missionary activity should not be seen in colonial terms; rather, Abraham was a missionary who was at home in the world of philosophers and was more acceptable to the lower class. Abraham's travel was a search for knowledge and a radical obedience to God's commands.

¹⁸³ C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology: Selected and Arranged with Comments and Introduction* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974). On page 574 it states that "the Father of all proselytes was Abraham. Therefore when a proselyte is named, he is called N., the son of our father Abraham" (Tanh. B., Lek, leka, 32 a *fin*).

¹⁸⁴ Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 228–30.

This Abraham is a virtuous ancestor whose skills outshine even the finest Greeks and Romans. In fact, Josephus is persuading the Greeks and Romans to be thankful for all of Abraham's discoveries. It is striking to notice that Josephus portrays Abraham as a man of law. For Josephus, the Mosaic Law was a guide to virtuous living. Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people, becomes the embodiment of the law. The language Josephus uses in the account of the birth and sacrifice of Isaac is worth noting. The father and son are portrayed as loyal and willing servants of God. Isaac is portrayed as a pious and obedient figure who rushes to the altar to be sacrificed (*Ant.* 1.232–4).

Both Isaac and Abraham are described as having *θησκευία*, or devotion towards God. According to Attridge, the word used here encompasses the response of the religious individual to God. While the word has cultic overtones, it is almost synonymous with piety or *εὐσέβεια* which, in the *Antiquities*, “is the proper human response to the fact of God's providence.”¹⁸⁵ In other words, Abraham's devotion is being tested in the birth and sacrifice of Isaac; it was the test of the soul for both Abraham and Isaac (*Ant.* 1.234). In Josephus's words, “Abraham considered that nothing would justify disobedience to God and that in everything he must submit to his will since all that befell His favored ones was ordained by his providence or *πρόνοια*.”¹⁸⁶

In the story of Aeneas, the gods were in charge of Aeneas's adventures, and his future was already determined by divine fate.¹⁸⁷ Likewise, Abraham's life is wholly dependant on power from God. It is God who exercises providence which, in this case, is understood as the “watchful, concerned forethought and consideration: Abraham agreed to sacrifice his son because of his belief that whatever came the way of those favored by God came through his providence.”¹⁸⁸ The notion that providence and fate ruled the world was a popular concept in the Greco-Roman world. The Augustan Age was imbued with the idea that the world was ruled by providence. Stoics believed that the world was “the planned and providential work of God, that human reason if correct must think in the same way as the divine reason, and that man

¹⁸⁵ H. W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquities Judaica of Flavius Josephus* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 89 and 116, respectively.

¹⁸⁶ *Ant.* 1.225.

¹⁸⁷ For a clear understanding of the role and place of Aeneas, see the introduction of this book.

¹⁸⁸ Attridge, *Interpretation*, 71–2.

should therefore accept willingly all that happens.”¹⁸⁹ Piety/faith was the proper response towards the providential work of the gods. Thus, Abraham was a fitting figure of piety because when he was willing to sacrifice his son, he was aligning his mind with the mind of the divine. Abraham’s pious response to the command of God is in keeping with the Stoic concept.¹⁹⁰ And in response to Abraham’s piety, God saved Isaac.¹⁹¹ Thus, Josephus managed to show how God regards those who conform to his will and obey his laws. In terms of Aeneas, those who followed divine fate would be blessed by the gods.

By the time of Philo and Josephus, the notion of Abraham as the friend of God was beginning to permeate the Greco-Roman world of the first Christian century. This notion is also found in 1 Clement 10, where Abraham was called “the friend,” because he was found to be obedient to the word of God.¹⁹² The picture emerges of Abraham as a pious figure, whose piety/faith is different from that of the Greco-Roman ancestors. In other words, the Jews were able to assert themselves as distinctive people by eulogizing such figures as Abraham, Joseph, Jacob, and Sarah. Related to piety is the notion of circumcision which, in the modern day, has been interpreted from various angles. Since it is not a major focus of this study, we need only mention this act as a ritual that distinguishes Jews from Greeks and Romans.

Josephus’s portrayal of Abraham brings us to the point that Abraham was an ancestor of the Jewish people. Diaspora Jews and those at home had received their identity from the founding figure, and that identity was to be preserved by all means. Thus, in Abraham we find a conservation of both religion and culture. By using Greco-Roman ideals, Josephus managed to present Abraham as the progenitor of the Jews. Abraham discovered monotheism, a new way of relating to God, and he discovered astronomy. Above all he was found to be virtuous in all things, a quality that was well respected in the Hellenistic world. In essence, Abraham functions in Josephus to define foundationally

¹⁸⁹ F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 69.

¹⁹⁰ Whitney J. Oates, ed., *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers: The Complete Extant Writings of Epicurus, Epictetus, Lucretius, Marcus Aurelius* (New York: P. E. Matheson Translators, 1940), 476.

¹⁹¹ *Ant.* 1.233–6; *Ant.* 1.14 where Josephus poignantly emphasizes that the main lesson to be learned from his history is that those who obey God prosper in all things beyond belief, and for their reward are offered by God felicity.

¹⁹² *1 Clem.* 10.1–7. See also Feldman, “Abraham’s Piety,” in *Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible*, 247.

what it means to be Jewish. Judaism in Josephus emerges as a superior culture with a religion that is far superior to that of the Greeks and Romans. In a sense, Josephus affirms the cross-cultural active participation of Abraham in the cosmopolitan culture of the Greeks and Romans.

The Apocalypse and the Testament of Abraham

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* portrays Abraham in terms of traditional paradigmatic motifs. The legend of Abraham's resistance to idolatry and the interpretation of the cutting of the covenant are common to the Abrahamic tradition. What is unique to the *Apocalypse* is that the legend and the vision are thematically intertwined. The legend qualifies Abraham to receive the vision because he refuses to worship idols. Through the vision Abraham becomes God's intermediary for a new message regarding Israel's future.

Four things are worth mentioning about the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. First, Abraham is a man of great honor. He is given honorific titles to emphasize his special relationship with God. For example, Iaoel, the angel of God addresses him as "Abraham, friend of God" (*Apoc. Ab.* 10.5), and God calls him "my beloved" (*Apoc. Ab.* 9.6).¹⁹³ The fact that Iaoel addresses him this way also indicates his honor, because Iaoel is God's highest angel, and he bears God's ineffable name.¹⁹⁴ In the same manner, Iaoel blesses Abraham, thus enabling him to receive a "venerable honor" (*Apoc. Ab.* 10.15). He is privileged to see a vision of Israel's future (*Apoc. Ab.* 15.1–7, 21.1–24, and 27.1–32). Second, Abraham is portrayed as a man of wisdom. His struggle with idolatry is to demonstrate his wisdom and he showed this by proving the futility of the idols.¹⁹⁵ Thus, his rejection of idols allowed him to receive the revelatory vision from God (*Apoc. Ab.* 7.1–8.6). Third, we discover that Abraham is a man who cannot be tempted (*Apoc. Ab.* 13.10–3). Fourth, Abraham is presented as a man who knew the law. His knowledge of the law is implied in his vision, because the vision is established on the precepts of the law. Thus, he becomes the mediator of

¹⁹³ See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, where Iaoel's name is equivalent to the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), 67.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *Jub.* 12:1–8 and *Wis* 13:10–6; also *Jer* 10:1–15 and *Ps* 135:15–7.

hidden things to Israel (*Apoc. Ab.* 29.21). In a word, he is the ideal founder who was given the privilege of bringing a new revelation to a new ethnos.

Having examined the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, we now turn to the role of Abraham in the *Testament*. The *Testament of Abraham* highlights Abraham's righteousness. He is a model of righteousness (*T. Ab.* B.13.9–10). No other figure is like him, not even Job (*T. Ab.* A.15). He represents the standard of those who will enter paradise. His righteousness is measured in terms of ethics rather than his relationship with the law, and is portrayed in a number of ways. First, it is seen in the hospitality he shows to strangers (*T. Ab.* A.1.1–2, 5; 4.6; 17.7; and *T. Abr.* B.2.5; 4.10; 13.5).¹⁹⁶ His righteousness is associated with the law. The portrayal of Abraham in the *T. Ab.* shows the patriarch's righteousness, along with the nature of death for the righteous and the nature of Judgment for the soul with balanced deeds. Abraham's age of about 995 years indicates that he lived long, and the writer was probably making an apologetic appeal to his Greco-Roman audience. In the context of the story, Abraham's great age shows that he was nearly immortal and that his desire for immortality lay behind his refusal to accept death. God challenged his desire by proving to him that every mortal being ends life through death (*T. Ab.* A.8.9). Thus, the *T. Ab.* portrays Abraham as an ideal man of righteousness. Having investigated all Abrahamic traditions we are now left with the challenge of discovering the differences present in all the above sources.

Abrahamic Traditions: A Postcolonial Reading

The above sources portray Abraham in a variety of ways. First he is an ideal figure from antiquity. Second, he is a cultural and faith ancestor for the Jewish people. This presentation is found especially in Intertestamental literature, Philo, and other writings of the pre-Christian era. A third portrayal by Josephus is intriguing. No doubt Josephus in his older age embraced some common causes with the Romans, and his

¹⁹⁶ The notion of Abraham's hospitality is based on Abraham's entertainment of the angels in Gen. 18:1–21. He offers hospitality to all people (*T. Ab.* A.1.2) as well as to the archangel Michael (*T. Ab.* A.2.1–5; 3.7–12; 4.1–4; *T. Ab.* B.2.5–6; 3.5–7). Abraham also greets the Angel of Death who comes to him as an angel of light. But when Abraham discovers the true purpose of the angel, he tries to argue and avoid him (*T. Ab.* A.17.1–3).

portrayal of Abraham falls in the same category. In Josephus, Abraham is portrayed as a Jewish Caesar; the one who fights, conquers, travels, and gains much wealth. It is fitting to label part of Josephus's work as Jewish imperial text.¹⁹⁷

I will delineate some of these imperial categories as they pertain to Josephus's presentation of Abraham. It is not surprising that Josephus, a military man himself in the Jewish war against Rome, should be interested in military portrayals of Abraham. Josephus's role in predicting that Vespasian would become emperor seems to play a major part since the general (Vespasian) later became the king and promoted Josephus to a higher status. Thus, in his portrait of Abraham, Josephus stresses the motif of kingship and generalship. As a Jewish Caesar, Abraham was "a typical national hero such as was popular in Hellenistic times, with emphasis on his qualities as a philosopher, scientist, and general."¹⁹⁸ The imperialistic tone in Josephus cannot be ignored; it places Abraham on equal footing with the Greco-Roman philosophers and emperors. The spotlight which Josephus puts on Abraham is that of "chosenness,"¹⁹⁹ to the extent that at an advanced age, Abraham will have a son with Sarah and that great nations and kings will spring from him (*Ant.* 1.192).

The Bible (Gen. 14:14) does not speak of the time and circumstances of Abraham's attack on the Sodomites, and all we are told is that he continued to pursue the enemy with divided forces after night had fallen.²⁰⁰ In Josephus, Abraham's success lies in his generalship as a warrior. However, Philo insists that Abraham trusted not in his small force but in God. (This difference between the two writers will be dealt with in the conclusion of this chapter.) Josephus's

¹⁹⁷ Imperializing texts justify traveling to and taking possession of distant and inhabited lands. These are well described in Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 57.

¹⁹⁸ Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 223.

¹⁹⁹ The doctrine of a chosen race or a missionary race places Abraham in the category of colonialism, but in reality what Josephus is doing is defending the cultural dignity of the Jews in the midst of Greeks and Romans. Thus, read in itself, the text of Josephus can be used to legitimize empire building and conquering other nations. The concept of chosenness is well stated in Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 54–5.

²⁰⁰ See Holladay, *Fragments From Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 1, *Historians*, "Pseudo-Eupolemus," 724, F.1, 4. (157–60).

Abraham crossed borders with the aim of conquering and establishing new settlements.

Related to Abraham's generalship and crossing of borders is the whole notion of the aggrandizement of Abraham by Melchizedek, the king of Salem, upon Abraham's return from the military campaign against the Assyrians (*Ant.* 1.181). This incident portrays Abraham as a colonizer who believes he may rightly travel to, enter, kill, and possess resources and lands that belong to foreign nations. From a post-colonial perspective, Abraham is a colonizer, but Josephus seems to have distorted the context of his travel. The emphasis on Abraham the general continues in a remarkable addition to the biblical narrative. We are told that Abraham's tradition of generalship was continued by his grandson Eophren who conquered Libya, and that when Eophren settled there he named the land Africa after him (*Ant.* 1.239).

Ant. 1.240–1 quotes the non-Jewish historian Alexander Polyhistor, who reports that two of Abraham's sons by Keturah joined Heracles in his campaign against Libya and Antaeus, the giant son of the Earth. The report continues that Heracles actually married the daughter of one of Abraham's sons, who became the ancestor of the barbarians called Sophakes.²⁰¹ The link between Abraham and Heracles can only be an *interpretatio Judaica*, not *Graeca*. Abraham's son has the honor of a continent named after him, and Heracles's victory becomes by inference the outcome of Jewish intervention. The story as told by Cleodemus employs the biblical genealogy simply as a vehicle for absorbing a Hellenic myth and extending further the long shadow of Abraham.

It is crucial for postcolonial readers to discern two main issues from Greco-Roman sources and Josephus. In particular, Josephus's account of Abraham is to be read with suspicion because he had an apologetic aim when he composed the *Jewish Antiquities*. Second, we can surmise that his portrayal of Abraham is a mirror reading of Josephus's own experience during the Jewish and Roman war that led to his capture, and consequently to his sponsorship by Vespasian. His paraphrase of the Bible mirrors the defense against anti-Semitism to which Josephus found it necessary to devote his treatise *Against Apion*. Thus, cross-

²⁰¹ There is a connection between what Polyhistor says and what is written in 1 Macc. 12:10, 20; 14:20; 2 Macc. 5:9; and *Ant.* 12.226, namely that the Spartans were descended from Abraham. In *Ant.* 255 we are informed that in the time of Abraham the ancestors of the Pergamenes were friends of the Hebrews.

culturally, ancestors can become political constructs through which a group defines itself. Therefore, Abraham's image not only as a hero to his people but as potent in the Diaspora carried special attraction to both Hellas and the Hellenistic Jews. At the center of Josephus's work is the issue of Jewish self-definition in the circumstances of a Hellenic-Roman cultural world.

Hellenistic Jews wrote for their compatriots, for their self-esteem, for their sense of identity and superiority, and for their amusement, in terms congenial to the cultural atmosphere in which they thrived. By selectively appropriating Hellenic media to recreate their past and redefine themselves, Jews made more vivid their ancient spiritual and intellectual precedence they accorded to their own traditions. Postcolonial readers must 'rescue' Abraham from this political and cultural defense. Second, we cannot have a comprehensive reading of Abraham from Josephus only, but our investigation should embrace writers such as Philo and other Hellenistic writers.

In our reading of Philo, the Apocrypha, and Intertestamental sources we discover some recurring themes of Abraham as an ideal Jewish ancestor, as one who was called by God, and as one who had all the virtues that far exceeds Greco-Roman virtues. The picture we have of Abraham is that of a God lover and God-beloved. In recognition of these virtues God makes Abraham and his descendants partners in the title "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (*T. Ab.* 49–51). The outstanding quality of Abraham in the economy of God is his piety and obedience to God's commands. Thus, in Philo we encounter an Abraham who is not motivated by colonial ambition; rather, his departure from the materialistic and rich land of Chaldea was instigated by a divine oracle. The oracle makes Abraham a nomad who wanders about without complaining about the wandering and insecurity. Not only did Abraham leave his country, but he left city life and went into the pathless areas where he survived through faith. Thus, faith makes Abraham the first among God's people. In our investigation of Philo's presentation of Abraham we discover that God held Abraham's faith in high esteem and God repays this faith with divine faith; which consists in God's confirming by an oath the gifts of children and land (*T. Ab.* 273).

The blessing of nations through Abraham is a melting pot of political, religious, and cultural constructs. God instructs Abraham to leave his country and kindred and journey to a land that God would show him. In obedient faith, Abraham journeys and comes to Canaan, where

God appears to him and promises him that his offspring will inherit that land (Gen. 12:6–7, Gen. 15:7). While this call of (and promise to) Abraham invokes the divine authority to travel, enter, and possess foreign nations and lands, neither Genesis nor Philo depict Abraham as an imperial figure. Instead, Genesis 12–22 informs us that he was a despised wanderer at the mercy of the divinity. In this regard, Abraham becomes a virtuous missionary—a missionary who is a mystic in that periodically he is confronted with challenges meant to humble him but comes out triumphant through divine intervention.²⁰²

In other words, I am not against adopting new ways of life in acquiring better culture, but I am only suggesting that such importations would be useful, meaningful and stronger, if cemented with the best of our customs and traditions, and not wholesale substitutions for the local patterns of life. Thus, the concept of a weaker nation working for an imperialistic nation must have its funeral. Rather, cultures should work together towards a common goal. Biblical scholars often miss this in their reading of the confrontation of the Hellenic and Jewish cultures. Even at its most antagonistic and even in the homeland of the faith, this confrontation promoted adjustment, adaptation, and indeed creative appropriation on the part of both cultures.

While we can appreciate Musa Dube's work on postcolonial readings of the Bible we should be careful in our readings of ancient texts, especially concerning Abraham and other Jewish ancestors. In the writings of both Philo and Josephus, Abraham exudes power and authority. More significantly, Abraham is lauded as the first to discover the belief in One God, and was the one who was "beloved of God." This does not designate a title, nor should it be seen as Christian interpolation. Rather, it lifts Abraham out of the ordinary and sets him in the glow of the divine. The superiority of the Hebrews—their character, faith, and traditions—constitutes a central theme of the works we have investigated so far.

Abraham emerges as the favorite of God, the one who trusts in divine beneficence, the loyal upholder of the faith, the fierce proponent of piety and rectitude, and the wielder of divine authority in Diaspora lands. Abraham could represent moral righteousness, com-

²⁰² The term 'missionary' in this book refers to one who must acknowledge and recognize the infinite capacities of others as equal members of the human family and must endeavor to develop such capacities so that, in due course, the contributions and interdependence of each race will be reciprocal.

mitment to the divinity and to religious principle, surpassing sagacity, fierce piety in the face of challenges, and obedience to God. Also, when we compare and contrast Aeneas and Abraham, we lift up Abraham from political, religious, and cultural manipulations.

Abraham and Aeneas share many similarities and differences when we compare their portrayals in the canonical texts of their respective religions (i.e., the book of Genesis 12–22 and the *Aeneid* Books V through IIX) and in Hellenistic-Roman and Hellenistic-Jewish literature. Both figures are patriarchs and founding fathers of their peoples—the Israelites or Jews on the one hand, and the Roman people on the other hand. Intriguingly, a connection of both of these patriarchs to their peoples is, in certain respects, tenuous or uncertain. Abraham was not born an Israelite, any more than Aeneas was born a Roman. Abraham was originally a rich Chaldean, while Aeneas was a poor Trojan whose land was attacked by foreign invaders. In relation to their peoples, both figures were foreigners and not of the same religious traditions. Abraham, like Aeneas, represents the motif of the wanderer, but also the phenomenon of the foreigner or alien. Indeed, these elements are constitutive of their respective identities, not only in an anthropological sense but also in a societal sense.

Abraham and Aeneas are ideological constructs which contribute to the formation of societies. But their societies differed in that Abraham's society was always in exile and Aeneas's society founded and established an empire.²⁰³ They share this function of society formation not only with Heracles and Odysseus, but also with other Mediterranean and Asian heroes of whom there are many legends, not the least of which was the Gilgamesh epic. This diffusion of the heroic founder figure indicates that we are dealing with fundamental factors in the self-understanding of Mediterranean cultures and the Eastern world. Abraham and Aeneas were not given the power to rule other people but to exercise wisdom with other cultures. For example, Virgil has Anchises define how the power was to be exercised. It was to be exercised wisely, with restraint and compassion, thereby enabling Rome's subject peoples to contribute to, as well as share in, the adornments of a common civilization.

²⁰³ See "Paul and the Politics of the Empire: Problems and Prospects" in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 17–39.

Both Aeneas and Abraham legends present an idealistic vision of world reconciliation befitting the call. Ideologically, the powerful can manipulate this for their benefit, thus turning ancestors into icons of “gold and glory.”²⁰⁴ Being ‘chosen’ could slip into manipulateness, self-assurance into arrogance, and high station into lust for wealth and material benefit. Therefore, cross-cultural readers must liberate the Bible from the “cultural imperialism of Western Christianity.”²⁰⁵ Figures such as Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Isaac, and Sarah should be expanded so they can be resurrected in other cultures who knew God even before the arrival of Western missionaries.

Being a descendant of such a founder is not just a given or natural state of affairs; it is a matter of the influence and claim of such founder figures which resulted in an enlarged form of identity and a sense of inheritance. That means that one’s identity was derived from founding figures. This concentrated form of inclusivity eventually took the whole world into its scope. Universal representations came to belong to this understanding of heritage in the Hellenistic and Roman sub-cultures, which included Judaism.

Abraham and Aeneas were both chosen by the Divine for their missions.²⁰⁶ Their missions involved embracing other nations, thereby promoting an “interdependence of nations, continents, genders, races, cultures, and political and economic systems.” However, these lofty goals have been supplanted by the ideological agendas of those who grab power and manipulate these founding myths to their advantage. Even nations that fight for independence need to realize that ‘independence’ from other nations and cultures (even from those that oppressed them) is neither practical nor the best means of survival.²⁰⁷

The interacting cultures of Abraham and Aeneas needed each other for survival. Both were placed under a promise that was projected throughout time in politics, religion, culture, and social realms. They were promised personal protection for themselves, their immediate

²⁰⁴ See Musa Dube, “The Postcolonial Condition of the Bible,” in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 10–1.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰⁶ Genesis 12 and 15; Aeneid 1.261–96; 1.278–9. “*His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono; imperium sine fine dedi*—The empire that Rome is destined to rule is to be without limits, either temporal or spatial Aeneid 6. 792–6; Aeneid 7 synthesizes the fulfillment of the divine promise, and Aeneid 8 depicts the triumphant rise of Rome in its hope of Augustan peace and reconciliation.

²⁰⁷ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 185.

families and their direct descendants; they were also promised something great for their later descendants.²⁰⁸ Paul picked up this idea and molded it using the concept of faith for all who follow the example of Abraham. In both cases the significance of the founding fathers and mothers stretches out to the whole world, so that even those who came much later are included among their descendants. The religions established in this way had a salvific significance for all humankind. Both Abraham and Aeneas are characterized by fear of God (or piety), obedience, trust, and trustworthiness through faith.²⁰⁹ In essence, they were both pious. The piety of Abraham is almost proverbial, well known especially in the Diaspora synagogue.²¹⁰ The piety of Aeneas became almost a slogan.²¹¹ The tradition of Aeneas is full of praise for his *pietas/eusebeia*. He is precisely "pious Aeneas."²¹²

In Roman culture, the term *pietas* was patriarchal in its original meaning; it was an essential patriarchal quality, and thus was directed toward the forefathers.²¹³ *Pietas* in the Roman world meant obligatory behavior toward God and the world; it finds expression in obligatory behavior toward the gods, those who had died, the living and those who are still unborn, the society, and the fatherland. For an African, (especially one living south of the Sahara) *pietas* is the essence of being in a community. Community is understood to include the dead, the living, the 'living dead,' and those yet to be born.²¹⁴ *Pietas*, along with

²⁰⁸ The theme of divine mission took the form of a journey that would result in the formation of a new ethnos. In the Abrahamic narratives, this theme is the central narrative thread around which the entire myth is organized, culminating in Paul's interpretation of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25.

²⁰⁹ Philo, *On Abraham*, VI. 268–76. Commenting on the faith of Abraham, Philo asserted that "such was the life of the first founder of the nation, one who obeyed the law, some will say, but rather, as our discourse has shown, himself a law and an unwritten statute." See H. Koester, "*phusis*," *TDNT* IX (1987): 266–71. See also Josephus *Ant.* 1.281, where he stresses Abraham's piety.

²¹⁰ Philo, *On Abraham*, VI. 273.

²¹¹ See G. Karl Galinsky who devotes an entire chapter to Pius Aeneas. *Pietas* expresses best what, in the eyes of the Greeks, was Aeneas's most distinctive achievement: his escape from Troy (3–61). Virgil emphasizes Aeneas's divine parentage and, in particular, his rescuing the *Penates* from Troy and bringing them to Italy. This, according to Virgil, is the purpose of Aeneas's coming to Italy, and it is this aspect of his mission that is emphasized above all others in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.378–9, 1.68, 1.148–59, and 2.293–5).

Mbiti, *African Religions*, 2–3.

²¹² Fulvio Canciani, "Aineis," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, vol. 1 (Zurich Switzerland: Artemis Verlag, 1981), 381–96.

²¹³ Zanker. *The Power of Images*, 101–66.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

fides and *virtus* were honored in the cult of the Augustan religion.²¹⁵ We must stress that the *pietas* of Augustus differed from that of Abraham in that for Augustus, *pietas* was aimed at celebrating Aeneas and his achievements in establishing Rome as an empire of the world. The evidence comes from the artistic monuments of the first and second centuries C.E., which testify to the unprecedented popularity of the Aeneas *pious* theme during that period.²¹⁶

In Philo of Alexandria we see how very much the figure of 'pious' Abraham became part of the theme, due to his wandering from home under a divine promise. Thus in Abraham *pietas*/faith becomes "the one safe and infallible good."²¹⁷ It is the consolation of life, the fulfillment of bright hopes, the death of ills, the harvest of goods, the acquaintance with piety, and the heritage of happiness.²¹⁸ This virtue came to define Abraham as one whose soul was fastened on God. The same can be said of Aeneas, especially in Virgil's presentation. Aeneas finally arrives, like Abraham, in the Promised Land. Like Abraham, Aeneas brings his family into a new homeland. In the case of Aeneas, the family consists of his father and his son, Ascanius, the founder of a dynasty upon foreign soil.

The stories of both heroes are full of examples of their piety, tested and proven in manifold trials which they have to overcome during their wandering. Yet in their wandering existence, they experience not only trials but also constant divine protection. But they are also endangered by the divinity, and this is part of their struggle. In the case of Abraham, this last motif is not so fully developed as with Aeneas. But the motif of being endangered does exist in the Abraham story, namely in an indirect way at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the dangers endured by Sarah in Egypt, and above all in the story of the near sacrifice of Isaac in the Aqedah.²¹⁹ In the case of Aeneas, we have tales of his constant flight from Hera.²²⁰

²¹⁵ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 55–90.

²¹⁶ See Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome*, 4. Chapter one of this book discusses the concept of *Pius* and what it meant in a Greco-Roman context. See also Zanker, *The Power of Images*, where *Pietas* is described as not just one of the virtues of the princes recorded on the honorary shield. It was to become one of the leitmotifs of the Augustan Era (102).

²¹⁷ Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism*, 139.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds., *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1–44.

²²⁰ Hera also endangered another ancestress of Augustus, Io, mother of Heracles.

An essential factor in the preservation of such a heritage and in the elaboration of such a mission is the firm hold on the task of being a founder, which is in both traditions.²²¹ In holding onto this, both the divine and the human loyalty meet. For Hellenistic and even more for Roman consciousness, this was a realization of *pistis/fides*. This concept is a mixture of trust and loyalty, and results in the hero responding to the relationship the deity has graciously established. In the case of Abraham, God deposited trust in the hero. Thus, God confirms this trust by an oath, and God's oath is a measure of faith added to that faith which Abraham antecedently possessed. Abraham is simply the privileged addressee of the divine promise, and responds with faith to the anticipatory preaching of the gospel.²²² Abraham's faith is summarized as follows: "By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed and went forth to the place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went forth not knowing where he was going" (Heb 11:8).

Tested in his country, Abraham was found to be faithful; his obedience to the divine command completes his lifelong rejection of the idolatry of his native land. Therefore, Abraham's faith in God's promise constitutes his righteousness or justification. In our investigation of *Jubilees* we dwelt much on this notion of faith, and it suffices to say that for Abraham, God was his constant trust.

Augustus also made *fides* into an essential element of the Caesar religion. Thus, the iconic status of Augustus as a benefactor was deeply entrenched in the propaganda of his successors.²²³ In breadth of meaning, the Latin concept *fides* corresponds almost exactly to its Greek synonym *pistis*; indeed, *fides* gives an even stronger emphasis to the legal dimension. I argue that Paul's audience could not have missed these cultural and ideological concepts in his preaching. What this demonstrates is that the first-century imperial context of beneficence allows us to postulate sympathetically how Paul's Greco-Roman audience might have responded to his preaching of faith/*fides* in God, not in the Caesars.

²²¹ This paradigm is illustrated by Moses Hadas in *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 253–63. Commenting on Virgil's work, Hadas writes: "Whereas Homer is concerned with heroic individuals, then, who make their own tragic choices and abide by the consequences, Virgil is concerned with an institution and a mission."

²²² Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 223.

²²³ R. K. Sherck, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 31.

I assert that Paul's readers must have thought of the many prominent representations of *fides/pistis* in Rome and in the Roman provinces where they heard Paul preach and when they read his epistles.²²⁴ From a methodological viewpoint, Paul's willingness to convey the truth of the gospel in terms of a cultural ideal (*pistis/fides*) provides a warrant for a cross-cultural appropriation of the ancestor as a concept that expresses the truth of the gospel. This environment, with all its associations, reminds Paul's reading public quite naturally of the perspective of law or justice, both in its private and contractual dimension, as in its political and religious aspects.

As ancestors, Abraham and Aeneas are models of *pistis* and *fides*. The relationship denoted by *pistis* and *fides* has a legal dimension to it that involves a discussion of law. Especially in its legal meaning, the person who has *pistes/fides* stands under divine protection²²⁵ in his relationship to the divinity and also in his relationship to other human beings. To properly understand Paul, it is important to note that *pistis/fides* is grounded upon a divine example or paradigm. The source of faithfulness is God alone.

Both the Aeneas and Abraham traditions tell how these two heroes of antiquity—in their manifold experiences of divine protection, in their temptations and struggles as well as their triumphs, and in their kingly calling and function—were destined to symbolize the national character and aspirations. In the case of Aeneas, the kingly function is clear; it is more veiled in the Abraham story, but still present (the Melchizedek episode in Genesis 14 being the most prominent example).²²⁶ The portrayal of Abraham as a wise person was important in Jewish missionary theology,²²⁷ which developed the motif further by turning Abraham into an exemplary king of Damascus. The Abraham and Aeneas traditions did not leave their founder figures without traces of prophetic ability, which is completely in line with the Hellenistic-Roman ideology of kingship.

Diaspora Judaism and the Roman Empire of the first century made Abraham and Aeneas not only their founding fathers, but also cornerstones of their respective religions as world religions. In the LXX and

²²⁴ Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 102.

²²⁵ Philo, *On The Migration of Abraham*, IV, 123–32.

²²⁶ Philo, *On Abr.*, 1.172.

²²⁷ Louis H. Feldman, "Abraham," in *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 228–34.

the *Aeneid*, these two forefathers are given canonical form. In their respective religions, Aeneas and Abraham are the models young men should emulate throughout life. And these models were to be propagated among descendants. Abraham is presented as such a model in Genesis 12, and Virgil clearly identifies Aeneas as a propagator of the Caesar religion in its Augustan form. Both heroes were the first in their respective cultures to follow divine commands. They are worthy models for followers of their religions.

While Aeneas and Abraham are ancestors of groups, their characterization and sense of mission is different. The Virgilian Aeneas is a symbol of Roman imperial ideology.²²⁸ In the Greco-Roman literature of the Augustan period, Aeneas represents Roman intelligence and sagacity. He was clearly aware of the divine prophecy concerning his fate after the fall of Troy. But he was not stricken with any fear, and he never ceased reasoning and calculating even in the most frightful circumstances. Aeneas was esteemed as much as Hector, but in a different fashion. The Greeks called "Hector the arm of the Trojans, but Aeneas, their mind, and they put greater stock in Aeneas's wisdom than in Hector's raging."²²⁹

Abraham is different in that he was not aware of his destination after he was divinely called from Chaldea. Second, he did not save the gods of his father, but trusted in the divine command. His is tested²³⁰ in Genesis 17:17, and was found faithful, in the sense that his obedience to the divine command completes his lifelong rejection of the idolatry of his native place.²³¹ Abraham's story is suffused with faith in the divinity. We can surmise that Abraham was widely understood as a model of pious conduct, and the divine role validates this model. The Genesis narrative attests to the validity of this claim, as do writers of the Intertestamental period, especially the author of *Jubilees*.

Only Virgil portrays Aeneas as a pious ancestor and even turns the hero's flight from Troy to his praise. In truth, we have no evidence that any of Virgil's contemporaries ever wrote about Aeneas. Given the absence of early testimonies of this kind and of an early Greek

²²⁸ Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome*, 31.

²²⁹ Ibid., 39. See also the portrayal of Aeneas in chapter one of this book where I discuss Aeneas, especially in terms of his piety.

²³⁰ Postcolonially it is a test for him as he leaves behind a wealthy family, especially his father, Terah, who had probably gained his riches from selling idols.

²³¹ Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 225–6.

tradition of *pius* Aeneas, a more natural reason for the choice suggests that Aeneas was a politically constructed ancestor. Aeneas is emphasized due to his escape from Troy rather than his spiritual qualities. We know from reading the *Aeneid* that Virgil's task was to present Aeneas as a worthy parent and ancestor of Augustus in whose honor the epic was written. Because Virgil's goal was to convey to posterity that Aeneas was the founder of the *imperium Romanum*, he took pains to present him as blameless and a worthy object of praise. Adopting this art from Greco-Roman genres, Philo and other Hellenistic intellectuals sought to address and present their traditions in similar fashion, so as to prove to the Greeks and Romans that Jewish ancestors are worthy of praise, and that their integrity and sagacity far exceeds that of the Augustan model.

While both heroes traveled under divine command, it is important to see them for who they were. Josephus portrays Abraham as a traveling Jewish philosopher. Scholars who see Abraham as a wanderer and colonizer are appropriating and perpetuating the hegemonic view of Abraham that goes back to Josephus. Josephus's portrayal is probably a mirror reading of his own character and what he wanted his audience to read in him. What I seek to do in this book is reveal a new Abraham, who was at home in the world of philosophers but also acceptable to the lower classes. Abraham's travel was initiated by God, and he traveled for knowledge. His life was an embodiment of radical obedience to God's command and of what constituted a Jew. Thus, in Abraham we encounter the honor of the Jewish people. Adjustment to the Hellenistic culture expressed itself not as accommodation but as reaffirmation of a lustrous Jewish legacy. A multiplicity of modes and an abundance of ingenuity marked the process, as we see in the Jewish literature of the Intertestamental period. Hellenistic writers such as Philo and Josephus recast biblical tales and rewrote history to embellish antique traditions and to elevate their place within the Greco-Roman period. These inventions assumed a still greater variety of approaches so as to broadcast associations with the Hellenistic culture and society while underscoring Jewish superiority.

To a much greater extent, Abraham was regarded as an ideal founder of an ethnos. Because he had a unique position as the forefather of God's people, Jewish writers used him as a paradigm to give authority to their cultural traditions. Jewish writers should be credited for achieving assertion of their position in the Hellenistic culture. The highest religious virtues are also attributed to Abraham. He is portrayed as

perfect in righteousness and beyond temptation. He is shown to have a unique relationship with God, which allows for special visions and special merits which send blessings to the world (*T. Ab.* 8.4–9.4).

This investigation has resulted in three significant findings. First, we have shown that the encounter between Hellenism and Judaism gave birth to a creative synthesis whereby each culture benefited and sought to live side by side on the basis of antiquity and legends which defined them. Second, while Jews endured a subordinate status politically and militarily, they still managed to maintain their identity and culture. Both in Palestine and in Diaspora, Jews continued to hold onto their heritage. Jews engaged actively with the traditions of Hellas, adapting genres and transforming legends to articulate their own legacy in modes congenial to a Hellenistic setting. At the same time they recreated their past, retold stories in different shapes, and amplified the scriptural corpus itself through the medium of the Greek language and Greek literary forms. In a world where Hellenic culture held an ascendant position, Jews strained to develop their own cultural definition, one that would give them a place within the broader Mediterranean world and would also establish their distinctiveness. (It is this cultural self-definition that we will explore in chapter three of this book.) Third, we discovered that each of the writers sought to preserve what constituted Jewishness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we outlined four main trends that Abraham represented within the complex world of Hellenism and Judaism. When the writers compiled the story of Abraham, they had their compatriots in mind—their self-esteem, their sense of identity, superiority and their amusement, in terms congenial to the cultural atmosphere in which they lived. By appropriating Hellenic modes of writing, Jews were able to display the spiritual and intellectual precedence of their culture in the midst of Greeks and Romans. Through Abraham, the Jews were able to establish themselves within the larger embrace of Greeks and Romans. Abrahamic tradition was not a diminution or a denigration of Hellenism; rather, the story grafted Jewish superiority onto the antiquity of Hellas. Creatively, Paul appropriated this mode of self-identification from both Jews and Greco-Romans to forge a new identity for God's people.

In postcolonial cultures, people retell their stories and couch them within biblical narratives. In that manner, peoples can claim a new Abraham, who was at home among the rich, philosophers, the poor, and foreigners. The Shona people of Zimbabwe can easily revisit their ancient ancestral traditions and claim Abraham as their faith ancestor. They can do this by recreating their past, retelling their stories in different shapes, and amplifying the scriptural corpus itself through the medium of the British language and literary forms. Chapter three will focus on modes through which Shona cultural self-definitions can be developed to establish African-Christian distinctiveness.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SHONA ANCESTRAL COSMOLOGY

A complex and often polemical topic in the colonial history of Zimbabwe is the role played by missionaries and British colonial imperialists. Both missionaries and colonizers arrived at the same time with traders, miners, soldiers, and administrators. Missionaries had many misconceptions about Zimbabweans. A common prejudice was that all Zimbabweans were “heathens, evil and wicked people,”¹ whose souls were in dire need of salvation. Together with colonial administrators, the missionaries devised a manner to rule and suppress the Shona people. The following words of Jomo Kenyatta capture well the ideology of both missionaries and colonizers: “When the white man came to Africa he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said, ‘let us pray’ and at the end of the prayer, the white man had the land and the African had the Bible.”²

The above words remain in the memories of most postcolonial Africans. The missionaries were the first to befriend the African chiefs and rulers in the name of Christianity. On the other hand, the colonial administrators responded by introducing the technological and material benefits of Euro-American culture. Zimbabweans were united spiritually by their belief in a supreme being known as *Mwari*,³ yet when missionaries arrived their observation was that Zimbabweans were ignorant of God.⁴ Both missionaries and colonial advocates were convinced that the Shona people needed to be conquered and dominated, and their gods and spirits destroyed. Second, Shona customs such as polygamy, bride dowry, divination, and witchcraft were considered un-Christian. The language of the colonizer became the official lingua franca, to be used in conversion, education, and acculturation.

¹ H. Aschwandan, *Karanga Mythology: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989), 34.

² See the whole story in Ali A. Mazrui, *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (London: James Curry, 1990), 1–14.

³ *Mwari* is a Shona name for God.

⁴ Ralph E. Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary* (Westwood, NJ: F. H. Revell Co., 1960), 17–62.

The destruction of the Shona language meant the destruction of the Shona identity. Thus, ancestors and ancestral language and rituals were no longer permitted—they were considered a blatant form of heathenism.

The entire Shona culture was deemed worthless and the white man became the agent of civilization in all spheres of life. The missionary's role was to anoint Western culture as the epitome of civilization and history, and to elevate the colonial administrator as the superior custodian of values, morals, and ethics. Parenthetically, imperialism and Christianity were made to look like humanitarian responsibilities. Clearly, the gospel must be rescued from this imperialistic and colonial culture, to allow cross-cultural incarnation of the word of God to all nations. This chapter will unveil the colonial and missionary prejudices that began in 1890 and continued until 1980. It will also show the extent to which Africans have become subjects of biblical interpretation by promoting the African conceptual frame of reference, especially the ancestral world view of the Shona people. I will now proceed to examine the constituency of Shona religion and culture.

Shona Traditional Religion and Culture: Precolonial Era

This chapter presents a brief synopsis of the traditional Shona religion and culture, and shows how colonization and Western Christianity negatively impacted the Shona people's ancestral beliefs. Answering the following questions will help shape and focus the information in this chapter: (1) What is Shona traditional religion and culture? (2) How did the Shona people know about God before the advent of colonialism and Christianity? (3) Who is an ancestor in the Shona traditional life? (4) What are some of the Shona traditional beliefs and rituals? and (5) How does the Shona ancestral world view assist in our reading of Romans 4:1–25?

Shona traditional religion was practiced before the advent of colonialism and Christianity,⁵ and is still practiced by some present day Shona. Elements of the religion have even made their way into post-colonial Christianity. Any biblical interpreter who plans to read the Bible with the indigenous people needs to understand such topics

⁵ For further discussion on the Shona religion, see Michael Bourdilion, *The Shona Peoples* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1991), 225–47.

as ancestors, Shona religion, Shona traditional culture, and political development. These topics form the context within which the Bible can be interpreted in the twenty-first century, and that is the same fertile sociocultural environment that can assist in the contextualization of Christianity in Zimbabwe. In the traditional Shona context, religion and culture are intertwined in ways that make it difficult to differentiate between the two.

The way Shona people view religion and culture is well expressed by John S. Mbiti, who wrote that “wherever the African is, there is his/her religion, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of the society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.”⁶ At the center of this religion and culture is a strong belief in ancestors. Ancestors affect the way one lives within the society. The Shona religion does not have a written scripture; the religion is passed on from one generation to another by oral tradition and through practice. More so, it is propagated through remembering ancestors, which occurs once every year. Shona children learn their religion through practice and storytelling. In other words, a Shona’s life is both cultural and religious. Thus, to understand who the Shona are, we must examine their past. We must understand how they understood God before the advent of colonialism and Christianity.

The period we are focusing on is 1890 to 1980, when the Western world colonized and evangelized the Shona people. During this process, the Shona remained united religiously by their belief in a supreme being, commonly known by the personal name *Mwari*. From the beginning, the Shona people were monotheistic in that they believed in one God (*Mwari*). In the words of M. Daneel:

The Shona concept of the Supreme Being has never been polytheistic. The great number of names designating the Supreme Being reveal a variety of functions and the association of the divine with different phenomena of nature rather than suggesting the existence of a number of deities. For centuries the Shona have believed in *Mwari* as the final authority above and behind their ancestors.⁷

As Daneel espouses, the Shona God is known by a variety of names and attributes. The different names help explain how God relates to

⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 2–3 (see chap. 1, n. 29).

⁷ M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 80–1.

the Shona. In some parts of the country, God is called *Samasimba*, which means the One who has all the power or is the source of power. In a word, the Shona refer to God as the “All powerful.” Others refer to God as *Nyadenga* (the One who possesses or resides in the skies), *Wokumusoro* (the One who is above), *Mutangakugara* (the One who was first in the beginning), or *Muwanikwapo* (the One who was found already in existence). In some realms, God is referred to as the *Musiki*, or the One who created everything. As creator, God is also known as *Musikavanhu*, specifically meaning that God is the creator of humanity. He is also referred to as the One who has always been there and the One who is Ageless—*Dandamutande ngawi rakatandira nyika*, translated as “the web that surrounds the whole world.” At times, God is referred to as *Dzivaguru*, meaning the Great Pool, indicating that God supplies people with water or rains. God is also known as *Tateguru*, which means the Great-Great-Great-Grandmother, suggesting that God is the source of life, and gives birth to all humanity. Sometimes God is called *Jenandebvu* (the One with the white beard), meaning a God who resembles an old wise grandfather. The God of the Shona people is genderless, neither male nor female. The attributes of *Mwari* have to do with what God provides, as depicted in the different names above.

It should be noted that colonialism and Christianity came to Zimbabwe simultaneously. In fact the two complemented each other in colonizing and dominating the indigenous populace. The complementary nature of the two is well expressed by David Livingstone, who wrote the following:

The Shona people have more in them than what meets the eye. I take a practical mining geologist to tell of the mineral resources of the country, an economic botanist to give full report of the vegetable productions, an artist to give the scenery, a naval officer to tell of the capacity of river communications, a moral agent to lay a Christian foundation for anything that may follow. All these are meant to promote civilization.⁸

Thus, we discover that Christianity and colonization were two sides of the same coin and the two helped each other prepare the indigenous people for Western culture.

⁸ John Kirk, *Zambezi Journals and Letters*, ed. Reginald Foster, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 309.

Great missionary pioneers like Robert Moffat highly admired the colonizers. He saw the colonizers as partners in Christianity. He expressed this thought when he wrote the following:

It is where the political organization is most perfect, and the social system still in its aboriginal vigour, that the missionary has success in making an impression. Where things have undergone a change and the feudal usages have lost their power, where there is a measure of disorganization, the new ideas which the gospel brings with it do not come into collision with any powerful political prejudice. The habits and modes of thinking have been broken up, and there is a preparation for the seed of the world.⁹

The missionaries were quick to identify with the Shona peoples' monotheistic belief. They found no need to explain the concept of God to the Shona. In fact, they discovered that the Shona were a spiritual, monotheistic people who believed in a supreme being named *Mwari*, whose cult flourished in the Matopo Hills near Bulawayo.¹⁰ This cult was one of the strongest elements uniting the different groups comprising the Shona. These groups were under the supervision of the chiefs and village elders who acted as priests and intermediaries between the ancestors and God. Thus, we can assert that before the missionaries and colonizers arrived, the Shona people were highly religious. In the Shona religion, ancestors were and still are of great importance. They act as intermediaries between God and humanity. As Mbiti says about ancestors in the African context: "They have both feet in both worlds, this world and its spiritual world."¹¹ Thus, the Shona always pray through their ancestors; indeed, their identity is bound to their veneration of ancestors. Ancestors link the Shona people with the past, the future, and the present.

The Shona had high respect for God, and so they did not approach *Mwari* directly. Instead, they went through the ancestors, to ensure that God was given proper respect. There is always a hierarchy in how elders and those with greater honor are addressed. At the end of every prayer, the Shona people mention God's name, both out of respect and to acknowledge God's position at the top of the hierarchy

⁹ J. P. Wallis, ed., *The Matebele Mission* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1945), 70–1.

¹⁰ Matopo Hills is a popular hill near Bulawayo—the second largest city in Zimbabwe.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 25.

of respect and reverence. The Shona believe the ancestors are closer to God; therefore, all prayers are passed through them. As will be shown below in the section on death, the Shona do not view death as the end of life but as the beginning of a divine life. Thus, they have high respect for death. The traditional Shonas believe that a father or mother who cares for and loves his or her child must be well informed of the child's struggles and joys. The caring and love do not end with death, since the dead are considered to be "the living dead," or "living timeless."¹² The physically dead continue to live in another form—the spiritual form—and in death, they can still mediate for their loved ones since they are closer to God. Thus, the Shona people pray through a hierarchy of the dead parents.

At the end of the prayer, one calls upon all the other ancestors, no longer remembered by name, to take one's request to God. Bishop Hatendi made the following observation:

A person is inextricably and indissolubly one with the past present and future. The time concept is the observance of the collective personality. The family group includes the dead who are revered because they are believed to be nearer the source of life; but they are never deified. They play the role of the 'go-between' as in Shona marriage and royal protocol. It is in this sense that the Shona pray 'to the dead.'¹³

The Shona people believe the ancestors are present with them, and venerating them is of utmost importance. The ancestors are dependent on God's will, and they take the role of mediators. The Shona believe the ancestors can speak to God on their behalf, but cannot change the will of God. In conclusion, Shona spirituality is rooted in communal memory of both the living and the dead.

Since Shona society is patriarchal, prayers are presented through the father's lineage. However, deceased females are also ancestors and are part of the spirit world. The spirits of both fathers and mothers were (and still are) expected to protect their children and grandchildren from the evil world. These spirits were supposed to be remembered. Thus, before the arrival of colonialism and Christianity, Shona spiritual life was founded on a cumulative tradition and inspired by a perennial quest for life's ultimate meaning. This dynamic, transfor-

¹² Ibid.

¹³ R. P. Hatendi, "Shona Marriage and the Christian Churches," in J. A. Dachs, ed., *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, vol. 1 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1973), 146.

mative, and constantly self-reflective and continuously renewing sense of being religious envisions tradition as a flowing stream, theology as embodied thinking, faith as a defining characteristic of being human, and knowledge as praxis.

Shona life involves practicing what the founding ancestors began. And faith is the ability to trust in the traditions of the founding ancestors. The most important elder in this remembrance exercise is the deceased head of an effective extended family—the father, who brings the group together on ritual occasions and ensures that it continues as a group.¹⁴ These rituals are practiced in every cycle of Shona life. The life cycle of the traditional Shona world view comprises three realms: the yet unborn, the living, and the living dead (whose bodies are dead but whose spirits live on). Those not yet born are believed to be with God in the spirit world, are born into this world, and then return to the spirit world after death.

Rituals play a crucial role in Shona life; they bridge the gap between the past, the present, and the future. Put another way, rituals express that the human being is fully human by virtue of his or her participation in a whole which transcends his or her existence and existential situation. Communication with the spirit world provides a link with the traditional past. When asked why they perform particular rituals in a religious ceremony, Shona usually reply that their elders have taught them to do these things. Yet missionaries saw these ritual practices and traditions as evil. They did not make an effort to learn indigenous religious practices. In the context of religious ceremonies, the persons who are honored or appeased are those who passed on the custom, and tradition is respected simply because it is the tradition of the ancestors.

The Shona people saw religion as life. No one was to violate religion, so to attack religion was to attack the political force of life. For the Shona people, religion was concerned with persons who lived in the past and their supposed control of present events. Thus, religion served to bring the past and the present together, promoting in the living community a respect for the tradition. In this way, Shona religion encouraged religious conservatism, just as the Jews sought to conserve the Abrahamic traditions at all cost.

¹⁴ Michael Bourdillion, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to their Religion* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987), 227.

In particular, Shona religion draws together the extended family group. In most funerary rituals, kinship and ancestral roles are dramatized, and the same applies to other rituals of the spirit elders. Quarrels are presumed to be displeasing to the ancestors. So when a ritual is performed in honor of a family spirit elder, all family members must come together and cooperate for the common good. Thus the Shona are right in seeing the continued influence of their deceased elders in maintaining the family group.

Having looked at Shona life before the advent of missionaries and colonialism, we will now examine how one becomes an ancestor.

The Etymology of Ancestor

We have established that ancestors play a vital role in Shona society by integrating the experiences of life. I concur with William Ferea who said that ancestors provide communication and continuity between the physical and spiritual realms and are crucial to the process of establishing harmony in the cosmos.¹⁵ The Shona believe that ancestors bring together family, society, even the spiritual and physical realms. Thus, they are a source of harmony. And to forget them is like forgetting the mother who nursed the baby. With this in mind, we need to define the word 'ancestor' in its Shona context, and then show how Christianity and colonialism damaged this world of ancestors. Consequently, we will discover how this damage left African Christianity without a context.

The word 'ancestor' is generally believed to mean the same in most world cultures. In the Shona culture, the word can mean many things—father, forefather, initiator, revered person, old man, teacher, and spiritual elder. However, in the Shona worldview, the word 'ancestor' applies to both male and female figures. The Shona people believe that every dead person is an ancestor.

Besides the spirit head of a family, other spirit elders may be honored formally or informally. A woman's mother's mother is believed to be very influential as a spirit, especially responsible for the woman's child

¹⁵ William B. Ferea, "The Living Living and the Living Dead: A Source of Harmony in the Melanesian Worldview," in Steven J. Friesen, *Ancestors in Post-Contact Religion: Roots, Ruptures, and Modernity's Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4–11.

bearing capacity: the cow of motherhood that a woman receives at her daughter's marriage may be consecrated to the spirit of her mother. Thus, the Shona world is imbued with a strong belief in ancestors and ancestresses. By implication, this also relates to the central question of what constitutes the quest for the transcendent and the sacred in Shona society and culture. The term 'ancestor,' like many other cultural terms, carries with it a variety of meanings. Some scholars have defined ancestors as those who have died yet continue to exist in an unknown place.¹⁶ However, the Shona believe their ancestors live in *kumusha*, a mythic village similar to what Christians call heaven.

Throughout Shona culture, people commonly speak of a village to which people travel after death. This place, or ancestral village, may be in a remote part of the forest, on or inside a mountain, along a river, or within a cave. These places are often associated with the origin of a particular clan or tribe, and are sacred to that tribe. When activities such as hunting or gardening take place there, they must be accompanied by rituals to placate the ancestral spirits believed to be living in a community similar to the community of the living. This mythic village is a place of rest—a final blissful place for sacred spirits—similar in some ways to the Christian notion of heaven.

Some have postulated that ancestors are deceased men and woman who pass away in their old age. The definition needs to be expanded though, because ancestors do not cease to function upon dying; they continue as a vital force whose existence is felt by living members of the community. One African scholar argues, "ancestors are people who have died in their old age, vested with power and authority and are still involved in the life of the living, especially the life of their kinsmen."¹⁷ This is to a large extent what Fortes has given as his definition of ancestors. He argues, "an ancestor is a named, dead forbear who has living descendants of a designated genealogical class representing his continued structural relevance."¹⁸ This definition is attractive and resonates with what Philo, Intertestamental sources, and Josephus say about Abraham as a Jewish ancestor. Every aspect of Fortes's definition

¹⁶ A. Anders, "African Pentecostalism and the Ancestor Cult: Confrontation or Compromise?" *Missionalia* 21/1 (April 1993): 26.

¹⁷ I. Kopytoff, "Ancestors as Elders in Africa," *Africa* (1971): 129. As I have delineated above, this is the principle characteristic of ancestorhood most cultural anthropologists agree upon, namely that the ancestors are involved in the life of the living.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

is relevant (specifically, death, lineage, and contemporary significance). We will explore these aspects of ancestorhood more fully to bring out the full significance of this religio-cultural concept.

We must emphasize that ancestor veneration as practiced by the Shona people is not ancestor worship. The Shona people, like any other culture of the Greco-Roman world, do not worship ancestors. Rather, we venerate them just as Christians venerate Jesus Christ,¹⁹ a practice that is common in many religious realms including Islam, Hinduism, African traditional religion, and Christianity. The section below will begin with this notion. I will begin with John Mbiti's concept of time, since it brings into focus a significant point, namely, that ancestor veneration among Africans reflects communal life and pragmatic faith.²⁰ It reflects the fact that the physically dead continue to live, and that the veneration of ancestors is not worship.

Like other indigenous ancient belief systems the world over, the Shona religion is a pragmatic faith; it espouses a proximate, this-worldly salvation rather than just an other-worldly salvation. This concept of time reflects the Shona belief that the living and the living dead co-exist, and that veneration is a continuous religious, cultural, and social practice. Shona faith is community oriented rather than individualistic. Shona religion is also embedded in, and expressed through, the culture and society in which it is found. These features led missionaries to view Shona religion as a projection of Shona social systems and mundane activities. They saw it as heathen and evil—a stumbling block to the spread of Christianity. Thus, missionaries promoted cultural imperialism with the aim of suppressing both Shona culture and religious practices.

The missionaries' form of evangelism promoted individual salvation and, in the process, divided families and tribes. The only means for creating change regarding power, wealth, and status was sought in class

¹⁹ While many Christians worship Jesus Christ, most of them such as Roman Catholics tend to venerate saints. In other settings we find figures such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley being venerated as well.

²⁰ This concept is well stated by Ralph E. Dodge, the first missionary Bishop of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), in *The Unpopular Missionary* (Westwood, NJ: F. H. Revell Company, 1960). On page 39, he writes: "The important thing in African religion is that every act of daily life has religious significance because through it one may either maintain good relations with gods or offend them with possibly disastrous results. From sunrise to sunset, from birth till death, every act is under the scrutiny of the ancestors and of the gods and, therefore, is performed with due and proper regard to the correct form prescribed by experience as pleasing to the powers that control life."

conflict pursued through evangelism and promotion of imperial education. The average missionary was determined to educate the Shona to embrace what he felt was a superior way of life. Consequently, the missionary's actions, attitudes, treatment of, and writings about the indigenous population became stereotyped and predictable. Time and space do not permit me to expound upon the entire perspective of the missionaries and colonizers. In a nutshell, we can say that their agenda was meant to dominate and control the indigenous people, as well as to annihilate the ancestral practices and rituals.

Time, Ancestors, and Spirituality in Shona Society and Culture

Even though Shona people received the gospel, virtually all of them still believe in ancestral spirits. They perceive ancestors as their supernatural protectors. A student of the Shona should not overlook ancestor veneration when examining their cosmology and thought patterns. When these beliefs are excluded, the Shona's understanding of the sacred is blurred and their quest for spirituality is damaged. Hence, the concept of time is crucial to an understanding of African spirituality. The traditional concept of time is a three-dimensional phenomenon—a long past, a present, and the future. The Western thought process is virtually devoid of the future and even the past. It is concerned primarily with the present. Thus, the idea of ancestors is not a Western concept.

For Africans, time is of crucial importance. The words used to talk about time are *sasa* and *zamani*.²¹ These two terms describe the notion of past, present, and future in African ontology. *Zamani* is the past but is not limited to what the West calls the past. Instead, *zamani* overlaps *sasa*; the two are inseparable. *Sasa* depends and feeds into *zamani* (a notion closer to what New Testament theologians call 'eschatology'). In other words, before events are incorporated in the *zamani*, they are first and foremost actualized within the *sasa* dimension. When this happens, events move from the *sasa* into the *zamani*. Thus, *zamani* is the period beyond which nothing can proceed. "Zamani is the graveyard of time, the period of termination, the dimension in which everything finds its halting point."²²

²¹ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 17.

²² Ibid., 23.

In the Shona cosmology, events are filled with a cultural and religious rhythm. The rhythm of life does not come to an end, just as there is no end to the rhythm of birth, marriage, procreation, and death. In other words, the human spirit is not destroyed at death; rather, it is born into a new spiritual mythic body called ancestor. The ancestors (or "living dead," as Mbiti prefers to call them) have departed but still exist, and their death process is not yet complete. When the missionaries and colonizers arrived, they violated this rhythmic process. In post-contact Zimbabwe, people are beginning to once again embrace these ancestral beliefs; thus, ancestors are still a vital part of the spiritual Shona Christian life.

The ancestors link the physical world with the spirit world, for they are in both worlds and speak the languages of both worlds. They are the best intermediaries between the living and God. In Catholic spirituality they are called 'saints.' From Mbiti we infer that ancestors (or the "living dead") are not worshipped. Instead, they are part of a religio-cultural group whose existence facilitates a direct link between God and the physical realm. Ancestors help keep family ties intact. In Shona culture, a kinship group is supposed to cooperate in ritual for the benefit of all. If one fails to participate in these rituals, he or she is to be excommunicated from the clan or tribe. A man who has been ostracized by his kin is thus deprived of his principal form of social and physical security. Most Shona people see no reason or incentive for breaking away from their traditional religion.

Having looked at the concept of time, we will now investigate the process of becoming an ancestor. The Shona people do not borrow ancestors from other tribes. Rather, an ancestor has to be part of the clan. This then raises the question of how Africans can appropriate Abraham as an ancestor, and consequently Jesus Christ as their Messiah. We will seek to answer this question at the conclusion of this chapter when we discuss Shona spirituality and faith. For now it suffices to say that ancestors are dead predecessors. Cultural anthropologists agree that one common requirement for ancestorhood is physical death. Through death, one joins the world of spiritual ancestors, and one becomes a protective force. Thus, the process of becoming an ancestor begins at death. Death is not the end of life, but rather is regarded as an inevitable passage to the next stage of life.

This process is given meaning by proper burial rites and ceremonies. For the Shona people, this period is marked by a number of rituals and ceremonies. Some of these rituals include cleansing (*chenura*),

a ritual performed to purge the family of bad luck. This is followed by a ceremony of *mharadzo*, or separation, performed to establish the departure of the deceased person from the living family members. It takes place a month after burial. This is followed by an inheritance ceremony (*nhaka*), where the family of the deceased is given a responsible figure to look after them. In all these rituals and ceremonies, drinking, dancing, and singing take place.²³ Accompanying these rituals are drums, shakers, and ululation (a joyful noise in honor of the ancestors). Rituals are important for the traditional Shonas as they progress through life. Rituals maintain harmony between humans, creation, and the spirit world.

To become an ancestor, the deceased must be properly buried by his or her kinsmen and women. Proper burial embodies all the rituals and ceremonies delineated in the preceding paragraph. In addition, the deceased must have experienced a good death. Most significantly, the deceased must have lived to a very old age, signifying wisdom and experience. As Dominique Zahan observed: "the individual venerated by succeeding generations is considered by society to be a moral, social, religious, and cultural model whom the living must try to imitate, in order to prevent the deterioration of their conduct and the decay of their powers."²⁴

The following are some of the virtues that qualify one to be an ancestor: genealogy, wealth, beneficence, practical wisdom, improvisation, forgiveness, justice, piety, good ethics, hospitality, courage, and temperance.²⁵ When a good man or woman passes away, the Shona generally avoid using the word 'death.' The transition is put in metaphorical language that connotes a traumatic event. The word used means "the elephant has fallen," or "the tiger is gone."²⁶ The word 'death' is avoided because the individual is greater than death itself, and death is simply the beginning of another life after this life.

²³ For a detailed explanation on these rituals and ceremonies see Michael Gelfand, *The Shona Religion* (Cape Town: Juta & Company, Limited, 1962), 120–35.

²⁴ Dominique Zahan, *The Bambara, Iconography of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 10.

²⁵ For an elaboration on these virtues, see Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). These qualities are also listed as the best virtues exhibited by Abraham, in Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 223–48.

²⁶ Gelfand, *Shona Religion*, 126.

Logically, age becomes a determining factor because it allows one to make significant contributions to the community. Age enables one to produce offspring, raise them within the framework and knowledge of the community, set good examples, and provide a link to those who are in the spirit world. In most African societies, moral authority and social status are a function of age. As an individual matures, that person is regarded as “more capable of exercising authority for upholding lineage and group values and also more responsible for doing so.”²⁷ For the Shona people, age is not only experience; it is also knowledge and power. It is the ability to live well in any given society wherever one goes. The Shona word summarizing all that constitutes good living is *ubuntu*. This is the organizing principle of the Shona mind-set, defining the pre-eminence of the interests of the community over the individual, the duties and responsibilities the individual owes the community, and the individual’s obligation to share what he has with the community. It is a beautiful concept that captures the essence of what it means to be a Shona Christian.²⁸ A person with *ubuntu* possesses knowledge of those who have gone before and the power of the lineage. Age advances one to a position of closeness to the oldest ancestor and, consequently, to the mythical powers that come from the Supreme Being.

John Mbiti states that many African peoples acknowledge the existence of two kinds of ancestors: the remembered ancestors and the unremembered ancestors. The remembered ancestors are still remembered by the living, and thus thought not only to be alive in the minds of the living, but alive in the spirit world as well. They are the deceased old men and women of the group who have made a lasting impact on the community through various means. In the case of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, such figures are Nahanda and Chaminuka,²⁹ the spirit mediums who were behind the successful war for liberation. These two are seen as the heroes and founders of present day Zimbabwe. Nehanda (a female spirit medium) is the great ancestor who sacrificed her life through hanging to maintain what it meant to be a Shona. Her

²⁷ R. M. Green, “Religion and Morality in the African Setting,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 14/1 (1983): 7.

²⁸ A similar concept is well explained by Paul in the Philippians Hymn (Phil 2:1–11).

²⁹ For a better understanding of these spirit mediums see David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, eds., *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981), 49–50, 73, 75–8.

struggle was to defend both the land and culture from British colonialism. Today, she is remembered in the same way Abraham and other heroes are remembered.

In Shona culture, ancestors are to be buried in land owned by their relatives. The ancestors serve the living in many ways, from providing a simple compassionate attitude towards others in the community to curing the sick. Their services continue even after death, either through the ancestors' spirits or through the knowledge they left to their descendants. In most cases, this knowledge is passed on through revelations and dreams. In other words, ancestors continue to be part of the community through protection, blessings, and maintenance of peace. They function as spiritual mediators with access to the divine world of which they are a part.

The life of ancestors is eternal. They are believed to exist in two worlds—the physical and the spiritual. Some ancestors are forgotten; the ones remembered are those who influence events like war and the establishment of major settlements. However, when an ancestor is no longer remembered, he or she becomes an intermediary and people still approach him/her as a saint. Mbiti refers to this stage as the final death. Their direct involvement with the Supreme Being and with the remembered ancestors seems to place them on a higher level as mediators between the spiritual and the physical worlds. They are considered mediators, but they surpass the mediator's role. Like the Supreme Being who is reached through the ancestors, such a spirit is reached through other known ancestors who act as mediators between the living and the unremembered ancestors. Unlike the remembered ancestors, they neither appear to the living in dreams nor in other forms except through the ancestors who serve as their medium.

The community of unremembered ancestors is similar to what the Roman Catholic tradition refers to as "the communion of saints." Other Christian denominations have no notion of saints,³⁰ so the one closest to our investigation is the Roman Catholic Church. The "communion of saints" refers to the interrelationship between those living on earth and those who have died and gone to heaven or who are still in the state of purification called purgatory. Ewert Cousins put it well when he argued:

³⁰ Luther, Calvin, and John Wesley function somewhat like ancestors, though some would deny it. But we find pictures of these figures hanging in public places.

the term saints is taken in a broad sense and not restricted to the officially canonized saints. It includes the entire Church community; living and dead: one's immediate and distant ancestors, the canonized saints, and the larger community of the faithful. This interrelationship is expressed through the following terms: the church militant on earth, the church suffering in purgatory, and the church triumphant in heaven.³¹

For the Shona, the unremembered ancestors would correspond to the Christian notion of the church triumphant, as they are no longer close to immediate ancestors but are closer to the Supreme Being.

The above portrayal of ancestors resonates well with Mbiti who argued that death is not complete until the living no longer remember the deceased person. When this occurs, the living dead enter into what Mbiti calls *collective immortality*. Spirits in this state are no longer formal members of any human family; they have no personal communication with human families or speak through a medium, or serve as guardians of a clan or nation.³² Mbiti goes on to assert that these spirits have no personal contact with individual human beings, but are still referred to in religious rites and ceremonies.³³

The notion of ancestorhood in Shona cosmology must take into account the function, place, and role of ancestors in Shona communities. The relationship between ancestors and the Supreme Being (*Mwari*) must also be examined. The institution of sacred kingship (and, by extension, ancestors) is an important aspect of the Shona belief system. From the myths of origin of several societies, we learn that the first man God created became the founder of a lineage, clan, or village that became the basis of the community.³⁴ Kingship ideology in the Shona culture continues to relate the dominant ideology and the sociopolitical order to the royal ancestral beliefs. Thus, ancestors in Shona society are immortal, and kingship itself is a timeless and enduring institution. As we observed earlier, death is not the end of life but the beginning of a more sacred life. Among the Shona, ancestors appear in the form of spirit possession, and they give advice to reigning kings on issues of state governance and assist in protecting kings from harm.

³¹ Ewert Cousin, "The Cult of Saints in New Orleans," in Friesen, ed., *Ancestors in Post-Contact Religion*, 17.

³² Mbiti, 26.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jacob K. Olupona, "To Praise and to Reprimand: Ancestors and Spirituality in African Society and Culture," in Friesen, ed., *Ancestors in Post-Contact Religion*, 53.

Functions and Participation of Ancestors in Shona Society

To discuss the function and participation of ancestors in the Shona world, we need to establish first and foremost their relationship with the Supreme Being. We stated earlier that “before the colonization and evangelization of Zimbabwe by the West in 1890, the country was already united religiously by the belief in a Supreme Being.”³⁵ This Supreme Being was known by the personal name *Mwari*. Africans believe that “the cosmos was created by the instruction of the Supreme Being at a certain time in the distant past.”³⁶ This being sits at the head of both the physical and the spirit worlds. *Mwari* is referred to by other names such as *Musikavanhu*, *Nyadenga*, *Muumbi*, and *Mutangakugara*. The Shona believe *Mwari* is the creator of all things, including spirits and humans. In some tribal languages God is referred to as the Potter.

The Shona believe the Supreme Being created special places within the cosmos that are occupied by different spiritual beings. The highest and the first layer of the cosmic universe is the location inhabited by the Supreme Being, the lesser gods, and other spirits. The Supreme Being is the inexhaustible source of life and vital power, and the unique agent of the vital breath of life.³⁷ The second and lower layer of the cosmos is the earth, the dwelling of the ancestors and ancestresses. The third layer is the center of the cosmos and the inhabited land of living beings that stretches endlessly to the ocean. This is the vitalizing center, the point at which all forces and vital power intersect. At the center of these layers is the binding notion of interpersonal relations between God, humans, and nature. The way to relate to creation (including land and trees) is based on traditional religious understanding. In other words, the relationship between the ancestors and the living can become a source of harmony within the human cosmos. The Shona idea of death and the afterlife forms the basis of this relationship.

³⁵ Dora R. Mbuwayesango, “How Local Divine Powers were Suppressed: A Case of Mwari of the Shona,” in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 259.

³⁶ Olupona, “To Praise and to Reprimand,” in Friesen, ed., *Ancestors in Post-Contact Religion*, 54.

³⁷ Ibid.

The instinct to relate is very strong in the Shona world view. For the traditional Shona people, this human instinct to relate to an outside power is not limited just to Zimbabwe, but this way of understanding how humans relate to God is readily recognized in traditional African society in general. A practical demonstration of the regularity of the interaction of living beings and the living dead is seen in the rites of passage for the living (namely puberty, marriage, and death) in which the ancestor spirits play a vital role.³⁸ Without the assistance of ancestors, these rites of passage would not be successfully accomplished, since evil forces—personified as witchcraft, sorcery, and the ‘evil eye’—are positioned to disrupt the passage as individuals endeavor to accomplish these rites. These evil machinations, if allowed, could disrupt the continued existence of human life and the cosmic order. The blessings of the ancestors ward off these disruptive forces, and thus ensure success.

All Africans desire to relate to outside powers for protection and blessing. Ambrose Moyo argued that

in African traditional thought, religion is not just another aspect of culture but something inseparable from it: a way of life which embraces all aspects of human relations. Zimbabwe traditional thought cannot conceive of a human being without religion and without participation in the life, beliefs and practices of the community. Religion and culture are as it were interchangeable. No African language of which I am aware, particularly in Southern Africa, has a word equivalent to the English term “religion.” The idea of such a thing, as isolated from the rest of life and practiced on its own, does not exist. In the Holistic worldview characteristic of all Africa, there can be no separation between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the material. Religion interweaves everything; hence asking an African “What is your religion?” is like asking “What is your way of life?”³⁹

Moyo’s point is clear: religion is something to be practiced and lived, and it is a way of life for the Shona people. As instinct, it is part of the human inclination and tendency to relate to a power outside of oneself, present from the time of infancy. When one grows older, the tendency to relate to God grows deeper through living and practicing.

³⁸ Peter Fry, *Spirits of Protest: Spirits, Mediums and the Articulation of Consensus among the Zezuru of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1976), 21.

³⁹ Ambrose Moyo, *Zimbabwe: The Risk of Incarnation*, Gospel and Culture Series (Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1996), 1–2.

Ancestors have human characteristics, but they exercise a superior power and have the ability to help the living. In other words, the ancestors are believed to possess more power and strength and have the freedom and liberty to exercise their authority in ways that elders cannot. Thus, they are able to maintain social and moral control over the living. Through regular offerings and sacrifices, the living secure the ancestors' blessings of good health, good fortune, and plentiful harvest.

A major question scholars raise regarding ancestors is the relationship between the ancestors and the Supreme Being. To provide a clear answer to this question we must establish that ancestors differ significantly from living beings and have special responsibilities for establishing the moral order of the cosmos and society. They have been freed of all human weakness such as conflicts and conditions of pettiness, which are common to living people. They are, therefore, eminently qualified to be the guardians of social, political, and moral order in the world.⁴⁰ Writing about the Shona people, Peter Fry remarked that "the society of the ancestors is a kind of ideal paradigm for Shona society as a whole, a society in which people behave without self-interest and enjoy their rights and obey their obligations defined by the ideals of descent and affinity."⁴¹

Before missionaries arrived, the Shona people believed their world was joined to the Supreme Being's realm by spiritual beings called ancestors. Normative power of the ancestors was given concrete expression in ceremonies and rituals. This was seen by the appropriation, rather than the worship, of ancestral spirits in the ritual observances of the Shona tribal groups. The focus of the appropriation of ancestors was generally the lineage Shrine located within the land. The Shrine was usually placed near the homestead because ancestors are supposed to be watching over the living. While propitiation took different forms, as the occasion warranted, in general it commenced with the invocation of the ancestors and the pouring of a libation at the designated shrine.⁴² Libation is regarded as a prelude to proper rituals. It awakens the ancestral spirits to the prayers and request of the supplicants. In Shona society, the dead are awakened to the presence

⁴⁰ Fry, 22.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bourdillion, *The Shona Peoples*, 219.

of the living through an invocation of their names and their lineage praise totems.

We must remember that most African people believe God is involved in every aspect of life. This God does not discriminate, and can speak through women and even through objects, as well as through men. God passes on blessings through the ancestors, and the ancestors pass on these blessings to the living community. In other words, everybody depends on everyone else. The vital force is maintained by the living and, in return, the ancestors bestow favors on their loved ones. In short, both the physical world and the spirit world are interdependent; they need each other to survive and prosper.

Communication between the two worlds occurs in a two way approach, namely among the living and then passed on to the ancestors. In some cases, ancestors communicate with the living through dreams and divination. The living have no control over their dreams, but the ancestors are believed to have, because the dream world is thought to be a spirit world. Because it is the world of the ancestors, it is one of the spheres they use to communicate with the living. In other words, the communication that takes place between the living and the dead is not a new phenomenon; it is a continuation of a pre-existing condition. Both the living and the dead have a role to play. The living must fulfill their responsibilities, or risk angering the ancestors. Ancestors can be angered in many different ways (for instance, if the living commit malignant acts against them or any member of the community, or if they neglect their sacrificial responsibilities). Africans must keep in touch with their ancestors and maintain a good kinship relationship.

Understanding the functions of the ancestors will help us understand their importance not only in the African culture but in Christianity. For Christianity itself is a religion of ancestors. The ancestors are perceived as providers, protectors, mediators, and role models; as Nyamiti puts it, they play an exemplary role.⁴³ Believers appeal to them in times of crisis, and ask for things such as rain and good harvest.⁴⁴ The ancestors are viewed as nearer to the Supreme Being than are the

⁴³ Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor* (Zimbabwe: Gweru, 1984), 37.

⁴⁴ The war of liberation in Zimbabwe was fought under the premise that the ancestors Nehanda and Chaminuka were inspiring people to fight and win back their freedom. For a detailed explanation on the role of ancestors, see Martin and Johnson, eds., *The Struggle for Zimbabwe*, 73–91.

living relatives. In such capacity, ancestors are considered helpers of the Supreme Being, mediators between the people and the Supreme Being; it is they who reveal the Supreme Being's will to the people.

Second, ancestors are perceived to be intercessors with God on behalf of the living. The intercessory role is not a new thing to the Shona people, because life with the other sacred world is lived around this phenomenon. Shorter argued that ancestors act as intercessors in accordance with one of two models, namely the plenipotentiary or the *Luguru model*.⁴⁵ Through ancestors, blessings are channeled to the living. Thus, ancestors act as elders and can direct blessings from God to living people. In the Luguru model, "both the creator and the ancestors are invoked together, with the implication that certain departments of the divine providence are delegated to the dead, while others are reserved to God himself."⁴⁶ Thus, the Supreme Being and the ancestors work together to provide for the living. In this case, the ancestors listen to the Supreme Being and vice versa.

With the above description we can safely assert that ancestors exert a tremendous amount of power and influence over the Shona people. The Supreme Being and the ancestors are key players in the African religion and thought process. Death allows the ancestors to approach the Supreme Being. We have shown that a hierarchy exists among the ancestors (the remembered and unremembered ancestors). All these respective groups form what the Shona call a community (*Zunde*).⁴⁷ The community extends beyond the living, for the community is composed of the living, the dead, and the unborn.

Most Shona people believe that every individual has a 'vital force' which continues to exist after death. "The deceased's vital force persists into the afterlife, but after death it can no longer increase itself. It is the vital force, the dead person, or the ancestor, relies on the living to maintain its strength."⁴⁸ The deceased person can only depend on the living relative who can continue his name either through child bearing or marriage. The family maintains and strengthens the deceased individual's vital force by committing his or her name and identity

⁴⁵ A. Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," *AFER* 25 (1983): 197–203.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 199–200.

⁴⁷ S. Mutsvairo, ed., *Christianity and the Shona* (London: Atholone Press, 1969), 45.

⁴⁸ C. Vecsey, "Facing Death, Masking Death, in Luba Myth and Art," *Journal of Religion in Africa* XIV/1 (1983): 26.

to memory and by passing on such information orally to other generations.

Several questions come to mind when we think about the core of ancestorhood: (1) Do the ancestors substitute for the Supreme Being? (2) Are they regarded as role models? and (3) How do they help cultures to understand Christianity? We could ask the same question of other religious traditions that are linked to God through ancestors.⁴⁹ What we find among the Shona religious system in relation to their ancestors is a continuation of their social, cultural, religious, and political format. This is a life from which the living, the dead, and even the unborn cannot be divorced. They form a core unity, and they influence one another. In Shona society, to be human means more than being an individual; it is being communal. A human being achieves full humanity as he or she participates in a community. The sense of wholeness transcends time in a continuity which unites the present, the past, and the future.

Just as the Shona cannot separate the past from the present and still maintain stability with the present and the future, so also they cannot separate the secular from the sacred and still maintain stability. Thus, the ancestors must always be remembered and acknowledged as part of reality. The Shona people desire to maintain friendly relations with the departed, not because they are substitutes for God, but because that is an ontological and communal reality. One's link with the past makes the future possible.

Here we find a point of contact between Shona religion and Christianity. Christianity has ancestors and genealogies, the Hebrews from whom Christianity stems as a religion, and the saints who provide the heroes and legends that relate Christians to their origins and provide continual links between those origins and the present. Here we must point out the difference between the relation of Jews to Christians (namely both spiritual and physical) and the relation of Christians to Abraham, which is the spiritual bond of faith. Because of their lack of a genetic tie to Abraham, the ancestors of Gentile Christians are as varied ethnically as were the peoples who adopted Christianity or had it thrust upon them. What Christians have in common is the faith

⁴⁹ Chapter one of this book discusses the entire notion of patriarchs and how they continue to influence the world's three major religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

of Abraham in the One God and the New Testament interpretation of what that faith meant. Like in the Shona religious life, genealogies are crucial in some aspects of Christian life. Genealogies remind us of where we came from and where we need to go.

In most religious traditions, ancestors are the founders of the tribe, the clan, the town, and the individual family. As founders, the ancestors are not only the transmitters of customs, but their blood and sweat actually built the family or ethnic group. Thus, they deserve adoration and veneration. The Shona believe that the ancestors made the initial appropriate sacrifice to ensure the stability of the community. Thus, the ancestors are considered the sustainers of the living community.

Some of these ancestors are believed to have died in battle, sacrificing their lives to God for the good of the community.⁵⁰ Having been in the flesh, the ancestors are acquainted with the human situation and are now in a position, as spirits with advanced abilities, to act upon the human situation for the good of the entire community. Thus, we find that the Shona religion—like Christianity, Islam and Judaism—is a religion with its founding events rooted in historical time. As the life and death of Jesus can be dated more or less accurately, so can the lives of Shona ancestors.

These founding events are what Shona people call culture—an entire way of life as it pertains to an African, that is, everything about the group that distinguishes it from others, “including social habits and institutions, rituals, artifacts, categorical schemes, beliefs and values.”⁵¹ What colonialism and missionaries destroyed was the Shona sense of identity, an identity rooted in ancestor veneration. The link with the past was destroyed. Tradition was rejected and the African sense of self was destroyed. In essence, Christianity was associated with Westernization, and the two were deemed inseparable. My task now is to focus on how colonialism and Western mission endeavors affected the Shona’s social, religious, and cultural fabric. After this investigation we will look at how postcolonial Zimbabweans arrived at new ways of reading and interpreting the Bible.

⁵⁰ See 2 Macc. 6–7, which lists heroes who sacrificed their lives on behalf of the community.

⁵¹ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 27.

*The Character of the Colonial Missionary:
Biblical Christianity or Western Culture?*

Here we seek to recapitulate the advent of colonialism and Western Christianity in the Shona context, focusing mainly on the impact of these two. The following questions will be addressed: (1) How did Westerners view the Shona people of Zimbabwe? (2) When Shona people converted to Christianity, did they abandon their beliefs and practices in African religion? (3) In times of personal or family crisis did the Shona people revert to their beliefs and practices? (4) How was the Bible read and interpreted to Africans in Zimbabwe? and (5) What tools were used to spread Christianity and colonialism in Zimbabwe? These questions have been haunting me ever since I started seminary education in Africa and then came to study in the United States. These questions demand a review of genuine Christian identity in the Shona culture. More so, the questions demand that we invent new ways of biblical interpretation—ways that will allow indigenous people to read the Bible in their own context. In other words, the Bible must be read taking into account the religious culture of the Shona people.

In an effort to understand the impact of colonialism and Christianity on the Shona people, we will present a synopsis of the educational system thrust upon Africans from 1890 to 1980. For most people, education is viewed as an empowering tool, but others who have power see it as reserved for the rich and powerful. In such instances, education is denied to the poor and uncivilized. The latter was the attitude of the British colonialists who came to Zimbabwe under the auspices of Cecil John Rhodes. I do not intend to give a whole history of the educational system of Zimbabwe, but a brief synopsis will help us understand how missionaries spread the gospel under colonial power.

The colonizers believed that Africans were and should always be the hewers of wood and the drawers of water for their white masters.⁵² Missionaries viewed the natives as paganistic, heathenistic, non-religious, and animistic. Both missionaries and colonizers undermined the indigenous people so much that everything African was labeled evil, syncretistic, and non-Christian. Ancestors—central to the African's religious life—were condemned as wicked. Ancestor veneration

⁵² Dickson A. Mungazi, *Colonial Education for Africans: George Stark's Policy in Zimbabwe* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 9.

was labeled ancestor worship, a term that misrepresented the Shona religious mindset.

The ignorance of the missionaries and colonialists prevented them from seeing the natives as a people with a rich religious and cultural heritage. In the traditional Shona context, religion and culture are intertwined in ways that make it difficult to differentiate them. John Mbiti argued that “wherever the African is, there is his/her religion, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of the society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.”⁵³ It is in light of this that we should look at the impact of colonial education.

Colonial Education and the Bible

Western education from its inception acquired political dimensions that would affect Africans in profound ways. In time, Christianity as a basis of new cultural relationships became a potent factor for controlling Africans in a new religious environment. Admittedly, the colonizing story holds that the Bible was the tool of the British Empire meant to civilize and tame indigenous people. In his book, Sugirtharajah captures the dehumanizing impact of the Bible when he comments on the picture where Queen Victoria is presenting a Bible to an Indian Princess. The princess is painted as knelling and the Queen is portrayed standing in a posture of power and rulership. Taken in this sense, the Bible was “distributed throughout the world as an icon containing civilizing properties. The African, kneeling, represents the heathen foreigner whose moral improvement was seen as the responsibility of the English.”⁵⁴

In discussing the Bible and colonial education, we must remember that a strong relationship existed between churches and colonial governments. Missionaries generally shared four things with colonial government agents: common nationality and culture, common race, administrative authority, and a position of privilege.⁵⁵ Thus, the whites, both missionaries and lay persons, came to Zimbabwe to pursue a set of objectives designed to promote their own interests. The

⁵³ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 2–3.

⁵⁴ Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible*, 14–5.

⁵⁵ Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary*, 19.

first missionaries, like Robert Moffat, sought permission from the local chiefs to build mission centers; however, these centers were not used to teach Christianity, but Western values. Both Catholics and Protestants sought to transform the lifestyle of the indigenous people. The question at the heart of this endeavor was who controlled the educational policies of the African natives? This was a contested arena in which the church was left with no option but to surrender everything to the colonialists. For security purposes, the missionaries looked to their fellow white colonialists for safety and support.

In 1893, Protestant and Catholic missionaries agreed that their responsibility was to teach moral and religious values, and the colonialists were to pursue industrial activities such as mining and agriculture. Therefore, under colonial rule, the Bible carried an explicit message of obedience and became an instrument of control.⁵⁶ In the context of colonial conditions, that control became synonymous with oppression and dehumanization. Cultural and religious values were put under colonial scrutiny. Ancestral values were deemed evil and worthy of destruction. In essence, Africans became foreigners in their own land. Their salvation no longer depended on their religion and culture, but on embracing Western cultural values.

Historically, missionaries have been glamorized as people who brought a new vision to Africa, but in reality what they brought was conflict between two religions, namely African traditional religion and Western religion. All colonial policies were meant to subjugate black natives. The constitution drafted at the Berlin Conference in 1884 was clear in its intent and scope. It was to protect the colonizers and the missionaries. The constitution read, "Christian missionaries, scientists, and explorers, with their followers, property and collections, shall likewise be objects of special protections."⁵⁷ 'Protection' meant several things. First, missionaries were to promote the moral interests of the imperial propaganda. Second, missionaries were to destroy all things considered harmful to the spread of imperial policies. The appointive power of the government and the church was almost exclusively European. In this way the church remained an agent of British rule, and Africans had difficulty receiving its message of love because they felt

⁵⁶ Mungazi, *Colonial Education for Africans*, 2.

⁵⁷ Louis L. Snyder, ed., *The Imperialism Reader: Documents and Readings on Modern Expansion* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1962), 211.

cheated and betrayed. Thus, the question of privileged position came into play. Because the missionary was a member of the racial group that was running the colonial government, he was at all times in an honored position merely by virtue of pigmentation.

Sadly, no African participated in the draft of indigenous education. The white people planned *for* the Black Zimbabweans instead of planning *with* them. The same policy worked even in seminaries; the white missionary felt it his duty to provide all the answers pertaining to the Bible. Education was to produce two things, namely cheap labor and an obedient worker. Missionaries in the end developed a very negative attitude toward the essentials of African culture and religion. Thus, they alienated themselves from the Africans, losing their ability to exert any positive influence.

Geoffrey Kapenzi, a Zimbabwean theologian, explains how the missionaries' mindset was detrimental to their cause and how they were losing the struggle for control of African education:

The vast majority of the missionaries referred to the Africans as the degraded descendants of Ham and as Kaffir Natives. Therefore, the missionaries did not practice Biblical Christianity, but colonial religion in which African—missionary relations were set in their colonial pattern of the masters and servants, superiors and inferiors.⁵⁸

This observation is an accurate representation of the views expressed by David Livingstone when he wrote: "True, the African, when Christianized, is not as elevated as we who have had the advantage of civilization and Christianity for ages."⁵⁹ Thus, we see that Africans were first and foremost to accept Christianity as a prerequisite to civilization.

Related to the above notion was the view that a white student was to be prepared to exercise political control over indigenous people. Thus, African students were placed at a financial and educational disadvantage. By instituting racism in the educational process, the government was able to design educational policies for Africans that differed from those for whites. The effect was that education for whites improved while that for blacks was substandard. Not only that, but white students were not to study religious education in their schools, because

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Z. Kapenzi, *The Clash of Cultures: Christian Missionaries and the Shona of Rhodesia* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 21.

⁵⁹ William Monk, ed., *David Livingstone's Cambridge Lectures* (London: Bull and Daldy Press, 1960), 166.

they were thought of as highly civilized and not in need of moral and religious instruction. African students were to be taught habits of cleanliness and discipline, along with basic elements of English so they would understand the instructions their employers gave them.⁶⁰

In summary, colonial education was designed to train natives for cheap labor. The Africans were not equipped to think critically but to take orders from British masters. The official policy was to develop the natives who were not in a position to clash with the European masters. Africans were even denied basic literacy, perhaps because colonizers feared they would become aware of the oppressive conditions under which they lived. In one of the debate sessions on African colonial education, a British official was heard to say:

I do not consider it right that we should educate the Native in any way that will unfit him for service. The Native is and should always be the hewer of wood and the drawer of water for his master.⁶¹

The colonial masters had no interest in training natives to be self governing. Even the missionaries followed the same policy because bishops and high ranking church officials were brought from abroad to serve as administrators.

In conclusion, the action of the missionaries in cooperating with the entrepreneurs later played into the hands of government officials who were ready to exploit the situation to control Shona education for their own political advantage. Elements of critical thinking were hampered, the context of thought process was damaged, and the African was made passive and docile. Having given this brief history of education, we can now focus our attention on the impact of Western Christianity on the Shona ancestral cosmology.

Christianity and Shona Traditional Religion: A Clash

As noted above, colonial education and missionary endeavors attempted to destroy the religion, culture, and socioeconomic practices of the Shona people. From the beginning there was a culture clash which was met with resistance. When missionaries came to Zimbabwe, they failed to recognize that the Shona people had a rich tra-

⁶⁰ Southern Rhodesia, *Ordinance Number 1*, 1903, Sect. D: "Schools for Natives."

⁶¹ A letter addressed to the editor of the *Rhodesia Herald* (June 28, 1912).

ditional religious heritage. Not only that but they also undermined their belief in ancestors—ancestors who had shaped African religious thought processes. The Christianity the missionaries brought to the *Shona* context was heavily influenced by Western culture. Sacred season, *Shona* beliefs, religion, and culture were all thought to be inferior to the religion of the West.

The missionaries regarded the *Shonas* as heathens, and also perceived them to be savages, cannibalistic, animal like in their behavior, and barbaric. Missionaries and colonizers believed the best way to change the Africans was to introduce them to Western civilization. They accomplished this through an educational system that trained the *Shona* to think as Europeans; the *Shona* were taught European culture, history, literature, and religion. This was an incorrect approach, because the Shona people had a powerful religion before the advent of missionaries and colonialism. What missionaries and colonizers failed to realize was that in coming to Africa, they brought a new Western culture. The Christianity they brought to the Shona culture was heavily influenced by materialism. In the mid-nineteenth century, materialism reached its peak in Europe. In some sources this period is referred to as the Victorian Age or the Golden Age of English civilization.⁶²

The English people (from among whom most of the missionaries came) prided themselves on being the founders of industry, civilization, and history. They unscrupulously assumed moral, religious, and ethical superiority over all other cultures on the basis of technological advancement. African culture was considered to be at the Stone Age level and occasionally at the Iron Age. The missionaries did not distinguish between biblical religion and European culture. Thus, Victorianism produced evangelicalism and, in turn, evangelicalism confirmed, inspired, and advertised Victorianism. The missionaries considered themselves superior and civilized, not because they had personally become Christians and were messengers of God, but because they were members of the English, French, Portuguese, or American cultures. That in itself is enough to remind us how missionaries treated the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Thus, Christianity was a means of

⁶² For a better understanding of this period see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture, 1983). In this book we discover that the desire to amass wealth and to enjoy materialistic prosperity and comforts was deep-rooted in English society. Thus, culture and racial superiority were measured in technological and materialistic terms.

‘civilizing’ the Shona people, a way to teach them about Western culture. Spreading the gospel included bringing steam engines, electric lights, hospitals, the telegraph, and guns. These things had no direct relationship to Christianity, but the missionaries did not distinguish between biblical religion and European culture.

According to Whidborne, “the European missionaries came to Africa to convert the heathen to Christianity, an attempt at replacing the traditional religion and culture in its entirety by Western Christianity.”⁶³ One way to civilize the Shona was to teach them white man’s religion and to convince them to abandon their traditional religious practices and ancestral teachings. The Shona homes were deemed evil and needed to be destroyed and replaced with Western houses. The missionary’s attitude is well illustrated by Zvobgo, a Shona writer who stated that

Missionaries did not understand, and did not bother to understand at the beginning, the African society which they came to evangelize. They assumed that Africans either had no religion at all, or that they had only a vague conception of the existence of a supreme Being.⁶⁴

These words were echoed by a missionary named Shimmin, who wrote: “these people with centuries of barbarism behind them, and with the bias of their moral nature so set against godliness are at first incapable of comprehending even those plain religious facts which appear so self evident to every Christian child.”⁶⁵

We discover that even in their language, missionaries had negative thoughts about the Shona way of living. In this type of approach, missionaries subverted healthy aspects of communal interpersonal relations, so central to the Shona’s religious and cultural existence. Hence, the Shona way of faith and salvation was also subverted. The Shona traditional religion had two approaches to salvation and faith. First, salvation was considered a communal event, but missionary Christianity emphasized individual salvation. Second, faith was also a communal concept whereby people believed together in the power of God who was seen in the change of seasons. Simply speaking, the God of

⁶³ Vicki Whidborne, “Africanization of Christianity in Zimbabwe,” *Religion in Southern Africa* 4 (January, 1993): 31, 64.

⁶⁴ C. J. M. Zvobgo, “The Influence of the Wesleyan Methodist Missions in Southern Rhodesia, 1891–1923,” in J. A. Dachs, ed., *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, vol. 1 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1976), 64.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

the Shona people is seen in natural ways such as rain, drought, animal fertility, family health, marriage, and good life. All these concepts were transformed when missionaries came.

One of the early United Methodist missionaries observed this shift when he wrote the following:

Conversion to Christianity was usually individual, and at conversion the individual frequently moved out of his tribal milieu into the society of the mission station. The United Methodist Church's emphasis on a subjective personal experience of conversion meant that the church did not attempt mass conversion or baptisms, rather, an attempt was made to lay the methodist Gospel before the Shona people in such a way that they would accept it individually.⁶⁶

The effect of this gospel was damage to family relations because people thought that they could only be saved individually. Concern for the family was destroyed. A Ndebele writer noted the following about the missionaries:

The early missionaries paid scant attention to the complex and often highly organized systems of the religious cults among the African peoples. They erroneously believed that Africans had no concept of religion, and ascribed their slow progress in converting Africans to Christianity to what they called the depraved habits and the low intelligence of Africans.⁶⁷

This quotation shows how the Shona people were placed in between two conflicting world views.

On the other hand, the Shona may have liked the new Christian religion and wanted to convert to it, but conversion meant abandoning that which was culturally and religiously familiar. The ancestral belief system that had shaped and modeled the Shona person's religious world view was condemned. Religiously, the Shona person was left with no context and no point of reference. Thus, the Shona were ambivalent towards everything the missionaries were offering. To accommodate the missionaries, most Shona people developed an attitude of acceptance rather than conversion. The Shona people were caught in between say Methodism and African traditional religion so

⁶⁶ Marshal Murphree, *Christianity and the Shona* (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1969), 9.

⁶⁷ Hoyini Bhila, "Trade and the Early Missionaries in Southern Zambezi," in M. F. C. Bourdillion, ed., *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, vol. 2 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1977), 39.

much so that when they fell into a crisis, they would revert to their traditional ways of dealing with crisis. In most cases, participation in Shona cultural and religious activities was condemned. African rituals were considered paganistic and heathen.

With this missionary approach, the Shona people became ashamed of their culture and religion. In essence, many people were now ashamed of revealing their connections with traditional practitioners because of the stigma attached to traditional treatments. While no Shona person denies that some of the Shona medicines are capable of healing, the missionaries condemned all that as evil. Thus, when faced with issues of life and death, the Shona found themselves on the horns of a dilemma whether to engage in traditional medicine or to trust the missionaries. It was not until five years after independence that Shona preachers began to encourage people to see salvation as contextual and to read the Bible through cultural eyes.

The missionary approach also functioned within the educational system. The most effective way to teach the Shona was to brainwash them and make them feel that their culture was uncivilized. Father Shropshire wrote the following on missionary activities in the early part of the 1900s:

Not until a truly Christian and scientific education has corrected the balance of the present Native psychological complex, and enabled the Africans to meet their phobias with a critical mind, giving them confidence in themselves and ability to control their own environment will they come to see that the wonders of magic and sorcery are not so marvelous as wonders of a truly and proportionately developed personality, the more especially if that personality at the same time maintains the true abundant (*sic*) of the fullest Christian life.⁶⁸

The sad truth of this observation is that both missionaries and colonizers believed the Shona people were primitive and inferior to Europeans. Thus, for effective conversion to take root, missionaries and colonizers set out to change the mindset of the children. The colonizers did not use education to benefit the African people. Rather, education was used to bring the Shona population down to a level where the colonizers could use them as tools, and remind them that they

⁶⁸ W. T. Shropshire, *The Church and the Primitive Peoples* (London: Macmillan, 1938), 421–2.

were inferior to the Europeans, despite the Africans' achievements in the process.

This dilemma is what cross-cultural hermeneutics seek to address. We must read the Bible through the context of a particular people. The subject of ancestor veneration deserves a new hearing, especially in the present age where modernity is against ancestors. As an African, I want to read scriptures not as a stranger or one in a vacuum or desert, but as one who is conditioned by a specific social, cultural, economic, and religious setting. This hermeneutic is cross-cultural in nature because it values pluralism, advocates diversity, and allows readers to investigate the cultural world of the New Testament writings.⁶⁹ A cross-cultural hermeneutic asserts that former generations continue to impact the living, thereby informing individuals about their identities.⁷⁰ The Shona people need to revisit their ancestral beliefs and use that context to reread scriptures in the twenty-first century.

What I have presented above demonstrates the impact colonialism had, not only on the Shona people, but on all Africans. Now we must ask what postcolonial Zimbabwe can do to redress the imbalance caused by missionaries and colonizers.⁷¹ The concern of biblical interpretation in a postcolonial culture should be the "real or flesh-and-blood readers as variously positioned and engaged within their respective social locations, with a further view of all such contextualizations and perspectives as constructs on the part of real readers as well."⁷² My primary concern is that texts should be read within the cultural bounds of the Shona people. The place to start is in language. The most noticeable sign of the impact of colonialism was the suppression of the Shona language. Both missionaries and colonizers introduced English as a language of communication, and this was done without negotiation. In schools and homes, children were taught English rather than their native language.

⁶⁹ Yeo Khiok-Khng, ed., *Navigating Romans Through Cultures: Challenging Readings by Charting a New Course* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 7. See Also Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 11–80.

⁷⁰ Kearney, *World View*, 1–7.

⁷¹ The term 'postcolonial' in this book refers to ways that challenge colonial approaches to biblical interpretation. Postcolonialism readings should open new access to Christian sources of spirituality, which were obscured by the colonial experience.

⁷² Fernando F. Sergovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, 49.

Ngugi wa Thiong, an author of African literature, correctly argues that one of the tools the colonizer used was to force European languages on the colonized. Even in present day Zimbabwe, most people think that being able to articulate yourself in English is a sign of intelligence; that is what the missionaries and colonizers taught. Before the colonizers and missionaries arrived, indigenous language was used as a tool to educate children about their religion and culture. Commenting on the centrality of language among African people, Ngugi wa Thiong wrote the following:

Language was not a mere string of words in traditional society. It had suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. The language through images and symbols gave us a view of the world. And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. English became more than a language: it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.⁷³

In this manner, English became the medium for instruction in schools and even in teaching religious education in churches. Thus, the Shona language as a cultural tool was suppressed and the result was that African children were alienated from their language of familiarity.

As per Thiong's view, colonization produced divided cultural and personal identities. Because the children were instructed in English, the Western educational system exacerbated identity conflict for children who were not fully cognizant of their Shona language, religion, culture, and history. In this process, Shona cultural and religious stories were lost and ancestral memories were repressed. Colonization and missionary approaches stripped the Shona people of the pride of using their native language in places of learning. Albert Memmi asserts that "in the linguistic conflict within the colonized, his mother tongue is that which is crushed. He himself sets about discarding this infirm language, hiding it from the sight of the strangers."⁷⁴ This statement indicates that the indigenous people were left with a sense of shame and self-hatred. In other words, the Shona people were forced to disappear into the cultural milieu of the colonizers because to be

⁷³ Ngugi wa Thiong, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in Africa* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1994), 11.

⁷⁴ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 105.

fully civilized they had to lose their cultural identity. Thus, colonization destroyed and distorted the Shona's spiritual being.

Memmi further observes the following:

We have seen that colonization materially kills the colonized. It must be added that it kills him spiritually. Colonization distorts relationships, destroys or petrifies institutions, and corrupts men, both colonizer and colonized. To live the colonized needs to do away with colonization. He must conquer himself and be free in relation to the religion of his group which he can retain or reject, but he must stop existing only through it. Finally, he must cease defining himself through the categories of the colonizers.⁷⁵

If the Shona people are to find meaning in the biblical text, they must begin the process of cultural appropriation and embark on the journey of self-definition. In other words, postcolonial studies can function as an excellent model for cross-cultural studies in the discipline,⁷⁶ and prompt colonized readers to move from the world of the colonizers to a world of religio-cultural meaning. Schools of postcolonial discourse seem to agree that people in former colonial countries need to cast off their colonial, oppressed, and colonized minds to be whole again.⁷⁷

The more dangerous and pervasive domination is the psychological and mental domination, and the Shona people need to remove this from their minds. Over decades, oppression becomes ingrained in the psyche and conscience of the colonized, thereby blocking opportunities for self-realization. Even if the colonizer was to leave, mental colonization remains because it outlives the physical presence of the colonizer. Fanon points out that colonialism creates an "inferiority complex"⁷⁸ in the natives which results in the so-called dependency complex of the colonized people.

Colonization is detrimental in other ways as well. By a kind of perverted logic, colonization destroys, distorts, and disfigures natives.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 151–2.

⁷⁶ Fernando Segovia, *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 54.

⁷⁷ Ashis Nandi, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). See also Albert Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, English ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*; and R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*.

⁷⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 83ff.

Colonialism's goal was to convince the natives that if the colonizers left, the natives would fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality.⁷⁹ This is what postcolonialism should seek to address in the life of Third-World nations. It should awaken people through a process of revolutionary literature and a national literature. Cross-cultural hermeneutics can facilitate this by making people aware of the two cultures they have been exposed to. It uses an integrative critical consciousness to help awaken and challenge the status quo, especially of Western biblical exegesis.

Thus, the need for self-identity is urgent. The way to recover a cultural identity lost as a result of colonization in the postcolonial context is to reclaim the past history, cultural elements and values. In this global warfare, the black person still faces rejection and often develops an inferiority complex. The black man must search for his identity and establish its lasting value vis a vis other cultures. The people of Third-World nations must have a concrete consciousness of who they are (i.e., know the fact of their lives as blacks, and be proud of their history—a history that contains religious and cultural values).

In essence, the Shona people need to decolonize their minds, their inner selves, and their whole communities. Twenty-first century critics need to cease believing that the Western way of life is the only right way. Instead, they should respect the Shona traditional way as a competing culture with major contributions to make to the reading of texts. I now conclude this chapter by looking at what the Shona culture can contribute to the reading of Romans 4:1–25. I maintain that we must interpret the Bible with the splendor of African cultures and an appropriation of our ancestors. Thus, a cross-cultural reading is in order.

The Locus of Shona Faith

To establish the locus of Shona faith, we must have a framework for discussing how the Shona people view themselves. Michael Kearney calls it their “world view universals.”⁸⁰ In this world view are categories that are applicable to Shona spirituality. These categories are “the self,

⁷⁹ Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture,” in P. Williams and L. Chrisman, ed., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 37.

⁸⁰ Kearney, *World View*, 3.

other, relationship, causality, space, and time.”⁸¹ The Shona culture has a saying—*Munhu vanhu*—which means “a person is because of other people.” This saying illuminates the way Shona people view the self or the essence of being human in community with others. In other words, one’s identity is defined by one’s community of “embeddedness.”⁸² The following Shona traditional sayings support the idea that the world view, philosophy, and self-understanding of most tribes is community based: “I am because we are, therefore I am;” and “One tree does not make a forest.” Out of interpersonal relations, one develops an individual identity. Thus, humans get their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual identity, security, and vitality from being in healthy interpersonal relationships.

In this view, people—working with conditions given to them by history, technology, the environment, social structure, world view, and their social relations with other people—create their own society. Thus, people do not make their history; rather, it is given to them.⁸³ They do not create history under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. Thus, cultures and societies exist in history, through time, and are constantly self-creating by responding to historically given conditions. Ideas do influence other ideas, they do combine and recombine, but it is primarily ideas from the past that shape those of the present, and when people recognize this historicity of ideas, they see that the practical conditions that originally shaped them are the main influence on the present. In essence, the current generation is heavily influenced by past traditions, and the living must respond through memorial rituals and sacrifices.

In this section, I seek to determine if the Shona religion can contribute anything worthwhile to the wider Christian community. Second, we need to see how the six categories⁸⁴ are represented in the global church and its scriptures. In these categories we discover that the presence of the self is dominant. The self refers to how one sees oneself based on one’s physical, mental, cultural, and spiritual make-up and

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 115–6.

⁸³ Kearney, *World View*, 5.

⁸⁴ For a description of the six categories, see the introduction of this book. See also Kearney, *World View*, 65.

one's relationship to the spirit world and all of creation. Ethnographically, the self is bound up with ancestors who are believed to influence one's culture and religion.

We have already mentioned that when missionaries came to Zimbabwe they found that the Shona people believed in a Supreme Being. Because of this, the God of Christianity was readily accepted by the Bantu or the Shona people. What was missing in the interpretation of the text was the appropriation of cultural values. A central concept common to both religions is ancestorhood and the function of ancestors in the construction of identity. Christianity inherits its ancestral concept from Judaism,⁸⁵ the religion that gave it birth; and African religion has its roots and most distinctive characteristics in ancestorhood.⁸⁶

The Shona religion has so much to offer to the Christian global community. First, they both share a belief in God who is viewed in existential terms. The God of the Shona people speaks and acts in the life of the living. A vital element of Shona religious life is its worship through ancestors, and these ancestors are similar to what is called the Communion of Saints.⁸⁷ The constituent part of the Christian faith which would make an immediate engagement with worship through ancestors is that of the doctrine and practice of Communion of Saints.⁸⁸

Christians south of the Sahara believe that those who have died in Christ still live and may even be invoked. This concept is emerging as one of the strongest points of Christianity in postcolonial Zimbabwe. This "great cloud of witnesses"⁸⁹—the glorious company of the apostles, the godly fellowship of the prophets, and the noble army of martyrs—is a sufficient counterblast to all witchcraft, as their presence

⁸⁵ 1 Cor 10:1, Gal 3, and Rom 4. See Paul's description of the ancestors of the Corinthian Christians as the people of Israel who passed through the cloud and the sea.

⁸⁶ Paul Chidyasiku, *Broken Roots: A Biographical Narrative on the Culture of the Shona People in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), vii–viii.

⁸⁷ The idea of saints is well illustrated by Philip F. Esler who argued that the one aspect diminishing in interest in modern times is the separation between the living and the dead. Western Christianity is disconnected from the whole notion of connection with the dead. This is even true in the Roman Catholic church where such a sense was once very strong. See Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 229–54.

⁸⁸ Faith and what constitutes faith is well illustrated as an episode realized in the lives of ancestors in Hebrews 11:1–14.

⁸⁹ Hebrews 12:1.

gradually comes to be fully realized, and also at the same time a less narrow conception than that of their immediate relatives, though these need not be abruptly excluded. If these people are taught about the prayers, presence, and power of these their countless friends and are given some human and historical account of their lives, they will be raised out of the narrow and circumscribed sphere in which they exist at present, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Because of the socio-religious nature of the Shona people and their fondness for ceremonial rituals, the Western church could actively engage them through the church's ceremonies and sacramental system. In this engagement we will also find many points of contact with such things as initiation ceremonies and purification rites (such as take place at childbirth, puberty, marriage, funerals, the founding of a new village, or any other milestone/crisis occurring in one's life).⁹⁰

In the Greco-Roman world, the purpose of venerating these martyrs and saints was primarily to keep them as examples in the minds of the living. This was not enough for the people who had worshipped the dead not so much because they had been good during their lives but because these gods of the dead were useful to them, protecting and assisting them in times of crisis. The saints, too, must accomplish something for the Shona understanding of the Christian religion. The modern church should also embrace this understanding because the saints are believed to act as intermediaries whose intercession with God reassures the petitioner that his or her prayer will be heard; this practice is not known in the Western church.

The Shona religion focuses on maintaining harmony with the environment. The harvest and sowing season rites indicate that, while skill and industry are necessary, one's labor must be in harmony with the spirit world.⁹¹ Shona ceremonies (such as offering a baby to the unseen spirits) suggest that major life events must be consecrated and blessed by an unseen presence. The Shona religion sees human beings as

⁹⁰ In sacrificial rituals, the Israelites were to recite the following response before God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down to Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous." This is well illustrated in Deut 26:1-6.

⁹¹ The idea behind this understanding is that the relationship of ancestors with those of us who are still living can become a source of harmony within human communities.

related to, and dependent upon, unseen forces; and wars and droughts are signs that society is out of harmony with the spirit world.⁹²

In times of crisis, the Shona people are quick to entrust themselves to the care of the ancestral spirits, confident that if they comply with their demands, the spirits will protect them from evil and misfortune. Thus, death does not end life; rather it transforms one to a new realm. Thus, the Shona believe that human life is impregnated with the divine or superhuman. In this belief system they have a code of ethics, that is, an idea of right and wrong, and a sense of responsibility to the unseen.

At the center of all Shona rituals is the search for truth. The task of biblical interpretation is to offer truth as experienced by the forefathers. The Shona believe that within them is a spirit that is not material, and that lives on after the body dies. This faith, together with faith in the existence of a spirit world into which these individual souls are gathered, needs no proving by the gospel. Instead, the Western church should be in dialogue with African Christians so as to find common points of contact that can be used to edify Christians in both worlds. For example, prayer is not new to the Shona people, because from time immemorial, the Shona have engaged in a dialogue with the spirit world. Prayers were offered through the dead, just as it is in the Christian community. Like any other culture in Africa, the Shona believe that God can only be approached through prayer.

Western biblical interpreters need to understand the two main principles undergirding the Shona religion. The first is the principle of kinship, upon which the social cohesion of the Shona people rests. The second is the principle of ritual forces which determines the Shona people's attitude to the world around them. These two principles are summed up as "the self, the other, and causality."⁹³ This in itself is the place where we can establish the whole notion of Shona faith. The notion of causality has disappeared from all forms of Western Christianity, let alone biblical interpretation. The ancient world believed in

⁹² Bourdillion, *The Shona Peoples*, 260.

⁹³ Causality is well defined by Durkheim: The first thing implied in the notion of the causal relationship is the idea of efficacy, of productive power, of active force. By cause we ordinarily mean something capable of producing a certain change. The cause is the force before it has shown the power which is in it; the effect is this same power, only actualized. See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 406.

the efficacy of its communal rituals, the practice of which was part of the glue that held the society together. The self is contained in the community of the not yet born, the living, and the dead. Without a community of embeddedness, the person is not considered whole. Both “the self and the other” are integral parts of understanding persons in the Shona context. Mbiti captures this idea in the following passage:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to the other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore, make, create, produce the individuals, for the individual depends on the corporate group. Physical birth is not enough: the child must go through rites of incorporation so that it becomes fully integrated into the entire society. These rites continue throughout the physical life of the person, during which the individual passes from one stage of corporate existence to another.⁹⁴

Thus, the self is not enough in itself. Society and religion produce a corporate person. A cardinal tenet of African society states that, “I am, because we are, since we are, therefore I am.”⁹⁵ The key to being human in Western society is based on individual success, but in Shona society a person is defined within a social, cultural, and religious context.

In the same manner, faith is viewed as a communal practice. Life, which is the essence of faith, is “recognized as life in community. The concept of individual success or failure is secondary. The ethnic group, the village, the locality is crucial in one’s estimation of oneself. Our nature as beings ‘in relation’ is a two-way relationship with God and with our fellow human beings.”⁹⁶

A Shona theologian noted that the Shona people have the community as their starting point in their definition of a person, in contrast to the West’s individual as a starting point.⁹⁷ A striking quality of the Shona cultural heritage is the concept of the dignity of human nature. Because a human being is a member of the human race, he or she has

⁹⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 139.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Mercy A. Oduyoye, “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology,” in K. Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres, eds., *African Theology En Route* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 30–4.

⁹⁷ Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 30–4.

the qualities of humanity and should act as such and in turn be treated as such, whether rich or poor, captive or free, chief or peasant.

This whole concept brings to the reader the notion of *ubuntu*, or the essence of being human in communion with others. *Ubuntu* summarizes what constitutes a human being in African traditional religion. A human being is made in the image of God and must be treated with respect; if anyone does not treat people with respect, that person forfeits his or her humanity.⁹⁸ A person with *ubuntu* has faith and is counted as a whole person in the African culture. *Ubuntu* is nothing less than the image of God stamped upon humanity, and by failing to respect that image one fails to respect God. This goes along with such Christian virtues as “service, humility, loving kindness, and charity.”⁹⁹

Shona proverbs are full of what faith means as they translate and teach what young generations should do. One Shona religious proverb is: “Varume ndevamwe, kutsva kwendebvu vanodzimurana.”¹⁰⁰ Hamutyinei, a Shona literature writer, translates the proverb as follows:

Men should show a spirit of cooperation and sympathy. They should help one another in times of difficulty and danger. At times, this proverb is quoted as an encouragement to work together. It also serves as a reproach for people who are reluctant to give hand to those who need it.¹⁰¹

Helping and forgiveness are part and parcel of African spirituality. Rituals of forgiveness are a central part of Shona culture. Forgiveness is not just an individual thing but a community exercise.

It is important to understand the Shona religion with its emphasis on ancestor veneration because of its continuing impact on the lives of postcolonial Shona Christians. I am challenging biblical scholars to re-evaluate methods of biblical interpretation that have been in operation since the Enlightenment. These methods have created a gap between the past and the present and, consequently, the future. Leaders for the postcolonial church must be trained with a cultural conscious-

⁹⁸ G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 36. See also Desmond Tutu, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 20–37.

⁹⁹ L. Matthews, *Consider Africa* (Cape Town: Longmans, Green and Co., 1935), 113.

¹⁰⁰ M. A. Hamutyinei, *Tsumo Namadimikira* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

ness, making them sensitive to the worldviews of other people. This will facilitate integration of traditional Shona religious values with the Greco-Roman values and consequently with the Western worldview. The next chapter pursues the issue of ancestry and spiritual progeny in Romans 3:21–4:25.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANCESTRY AND DESCENDANCY IN ROMANS 4

The introduction and chapter one demonstrated the importance Greco-Roman and Jewish authors attached to their ancestors, namely Aeneas and Abraham. Both figures played a national and religious role in providing identity to their peoples. Aeneas represented a powerful pedigree, whereas Abraham was an ancestor of a despised people. For the ancient Jewish sources, Abraham is the celebrated ancestor of the Jews (3 Macc 6:3; *Ant.* 12.226; 14.255). In Hellenistic Judaism, Abraham is a model even of Greek virtues (*Migration* 125, *Ant.* 1.148–256). Unlike Aeneas, Abraham occupies a central place in the emerging Christian self-identity in its relationship with and departure from the early Jewish and Augustan Era.

Ethnic descent and Torah observance, however, no longer define the seed of Abraham; now the Spirit and faith in Christ accomplish this (Rom 4:9, 9:7; Gal 3:7–9, 22, 29). In Paul's appropriation of ancestor language, the way is open for both believing Jews and Gentiles, because Abraham, the first proselyte, believed in God and trusted God's promises before he was circumcised (Rom 4:2, 12–25; Gal 3:6–8, 18). In later writings, Abraham is praised for his faith which led him to obey God's call, to leave his materialistic and wealthy home and trust in God's promise of numerous descendants (Heb 11:8–12).

In this chapter I intend to establish new ways that Christians in Zimbabwe can similarly appropriate Abraham as a spiritual ancestor within their world view, and consequently accept Jesus as a cross-cultural savior. Three issues will occupy us in this chapter. First, we will explore the image of the spiritual Abraham in Romans 4:1–25. Second, we will examine the image of Abraham's God revealed both in Genesis and Romans 4. Third, we will briefly examine the faith that Paul is advocating for the good of all nations. Investigating these issues is the key to a postcolonial¹ interpretation of the God of Abraham that Paul is proposing in Romans.

¹ The term 'postcolonial' in this chapter refers to a way of decolonizing the colonized's mind so that individuals can read scriptures with a critical mind, a mind that

The question to be answered is: On what basis does Abraham become the ancestor of God's people? And how does this faith manifest itself in the events that unfold before Abraham? Roman 4:1 is the key to a proper understanding of Paul's exposition on the centrality of Abraham's ancestry: "What, then shall we say about Abraham our forefather according to the flesh?" According to Stowers, it is the voice of ethnic, national, and religious pride that interrupts Paul, urgently and anxiously.² Romans 3:21–6, in my cross-cultural judgment, motivated this ethnic voice. Paul begins his argument by stating that it is the faith of Jesus that reveals the righteousness of God and because of that all national distinctions are destroyed (3:22). After a dense, explosive, eschatological paragraph on the revelation of God's righteousness through the faith of Jesus Christ, the dialogue with the Jewish-Christian teacher resumes: "What then, becomes of our boasting?" (3:27). This is not just a matter of pride. Paul connects the word *καύχησις* with judgment. Jews took pride in keeping the law as a special practice before God. In a diatribe style Paul abolishes all the boasting and this can be seen as a result of what Paul said in 3:21–26.

What Paul attacks is the self-confidence of the Jews as a special people, their assertion that God was theirs alone, the pride they took in the law as indicating God's commitment to them and as marking them off from other nations.³ The dialogue with the teacher turns around the question: On what basis are the peoples made righteous before God? The figure of Abraham, the Father, becomes the focus of the discussion, and this is what we must seek to understand. We should note that Paul does not quarrel with the teacher's assumption about the importance of Abraham and his connection to him. The matter at stake between Paul and the teacher is, rather, in what respect does Abraham serve as a model of how God brings to pass his promises by

realizes that Abraham's God is a down-to-earth God, and even Abraham himself is a despised ancestor whose life was characterized with trials and death-wrenching experiences, yet he was able to survive and won God's favor as a "friend of God." Similarly, Zimbabweans can appropriate this figure in conjunction with their own ancestors who vicariously suffered and later emerged from colonial domination.

² Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 202–5.

³ James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publishers, 1988), 185.

founding lineages that incorporate whole peoples into the blessings made possible by the founding ancestor?⁴

Thus, Romans 4 confronts us with a cross-cultural question in terms of how Abraham can be appropriated by other nations. It is hard to read Romans in this way, particularly after the Reformation, Enlightenment, and colonial empires. Christianity has been viewed as a religion of those in power, especially the West, who for years assumed a missionary posture in terms of spreading the gospel to other nations. After the Reformation, scholars read Romans through a lens of individualism. They saw Romans as dealing with the issue of how God saves individual human beings. But in chapter four Paul and his Jewish-Christian interlocutor are debating how peoples establish a kinship with God and one another. Some Jews may have thought they inherited a status as God's children from generation to generation—a relationship with God that other peoples did not have. Similarly, Greco-Roman people might have boasted about their allegiance to Augustus's Claudian-Julian propaganda that depicted him as the elect Savior of Providence and the iconic benefactor of the world.

In Romans 4, Paul presents Abraham as the ancestor of all who have faith in God in order to establish a basis of common identity for Jews and Gentiles. In constructing Abraham as a spiritual ancestor, Paul not only builds upon an apologetic tradition in Hellenistic Judaism, but also interacts with an ideological trend in early Roman imperialism, which sought to reconcile Greeks and Romans by establishing Aeneas as a common cultural ancestor. Thus, Paul's portrayal of Abraham as an ancestor of Jews and Greeks is an ideological construct similar to one that would have been familiar to his Roman audience shaped by the propaganda of the Augustan Age (26 B.C.E.–68 C.E.). Yet, by asserting that Abraham the Jew, rather than Aeneas the Roman, is the ancestor of the people of faith/*fides*, Paul constructs a liberating counter-ideology, which subverts the basis of Roman power.

As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul is concerned about how Gentiles get into the lineage, so they can stand before God as righteous, rather than as enemies and aliens. Chapters one and two of this book dealt with the search for identity through an ancestor who defines kinship and identity. Chapter one showed how Dionysius of Halicarnassus elaborated on the meeting of Aeneas and King Latinus and how the

⁴ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 227.

two figures (a Greek and a Roman) came to reconcile. Their story is about the construction of a new shared identity, and helps us grasp the issue at stake between Paul and the Jewish interlocutor. In discussing Israel's relationship to other peoples of the world, Paul and the Jewish teacher turn to the patriarchal story of the one who founded Israel. Both Paul and the teacher are seeking a norm of identity. The issue at stake is: On what basis is identity and reconciliation established? How can other people claim Abraham as their Father? It is apparent that both Paul and the Jewish Christian teacher are missionaries. Ideologically, the mission we are trying to seek is one that advocates for a relationship of equals, a relationship that acknowledges one ancestor and promotes equal dialogue between the weak and the powerful.

Two things seem decisive for Paul's position. First, Paul understands that the law was given to Moses many years after Abraham lived, and he found evidence in Genesis 15:6 that Abraham's righteousness before God was not based on his adherence to the law. Second, Paul's understanding of the Christ event influenced his interpretation of Abraham. The εὐαγγέλιον, according to Paul, is a message of Jesus's complete surrender to God; he allowed himself to be crucified to redeem others. Paul's Jesus did not require people to raise themselves to his level to become righteous. Paul declares Jesus's radical acceptance of God's plan for him, even unto death "for" others, to be a pure gift to all humanity.⁵ This influences the way Paul views Abraham and, consequently, his understanding of scripture. Paul describes in the strongest possible terms the difference between his earlier life as a persecutor of the church and his present life in Christ.⁶ According to Paul, God did not require Abraham to keep a code of specific commandments as a prerequisite to accepting him. God's approach required only that Abraham trust in the divine promises in a way that assured Abraham's faithfulness to the hopes embodied in those promises.

⁵ Dieter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 68–9. Georgi points out that the motif of a vicarious death for others was well honored in the Greco-Roman world. Thus, a Greco-Roman audience probably viewed the death of Jesus as martyrdom for the good of others. Also see S. K. Williams, *The Saving Significance of Jesus' Death* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1971).

⁶ Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 117.

Specifically, in spite of being too old to procreate, Abraham and Sarah had sexual intercourse because of God's promise (Rom 4:19–21). Abraham's response to God's promise was not an act of law keeping, but a demonstration of faith. In Paul's view, the essential ingredient in God and Abraham's relationship came about when Abraham put his trust in what God said. The fact that Genesis 15:6 has God accepting Abraham as righteous when the patriarch first hears the promise and before he could act out his faith, means that his trust/faith in God was the primary generative act that ensured Abraham's paternity; works and circumcision had no role. Thus, Jews and Gentiles can become children of Abraham on the basis of something deeper than ethnicity. Paul envisions an identity and community that is universal in scope.

We should be careful, however, not to separate Abraham's faith from his faithfulness. It was Abraham's faithfulness that caused Abraham and Sarah to conceive. That in itself was an act of complete and perfect trust in God's promises. In other words, Abraham's faith had no independent status in isolation from faithful acts. Abraham's faithfulness is different from the Western Reformation understanding in which religious faith belongs to an interior and personal sphere of sentiment and spirituality. Abraham's faith was oriented toward the future; therefore, it was an affair of the heart, and God saw what the human eye could not see. In this sense, all who have the generative faith of Abraham are his descendants. It is within this context that Paul speaks to us about Abraham's God. With this brief background we will proceed to examine the qualities of God that Paul presents in Romans.

The Nature of God in Romans

Romans 3:21–7 provides important clues to help us understand Paul's view of God. If there was one characteristic that captured Paul's imagination more than another, it was the δικαιοσύνη Θεού. Related to this are concepts such as εὐαγγέλιον, χάρις, and πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. These theological concepts contain a rich selection of what Paul is saying about God and Abraham. The concept of 'righteousness' will be discussed mainly in the context in which Paul appropriates its meaning. Paul does not use the concept in its Jewish context, where the stress is on an individual meeting obligations because of the relationship he or

she is in. Instead, the righteousness of God denotes God's fulfillment of the obligations he took upon himself in creating humankind, and particularly in calling Abraham and choosing Israel to be his people.⁷ Fundamental to this concept of God's righteousness, therefore, is recognizing God's prior initiative, both in creation and in election. God's righteousness was simply the fulfillment of his covenant obligation as Israel's God in delivering, saving, and vindicating Israel despite the people's failures. God's righteousness had in its grand scope the universe as its sphere of operation, including those areas of the universe that for so many years have been avoided by most New Testament readers.

In Romans 3:21, Paul confronts the entire world (which, in my judgment was represented by Rome) with the δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ, which is a quality only God can claim. God's righteousness is imbued with God's "fairness, justice, equitableness and redemptive action,"⁸ focused not toward a particular group of people but toward the entire universe. In Pauline thought, this divine quality is not strictly on the reward of goodness, but has its focus on working out a plan of salvation for all humanity.⁹ Here the words of Victor Paul Furnish are instructive, for he asserts that "God's righteousness expresses itself as power in his redemptive activity, and has also to do with his faithfulness and truth as expressed in his establishment and maintenance of a covenantal relationship with his people."¹⁰

Thus, Paul understands God's righteousness to encompass his power, truth, and faithfulness as expressed in creation, the covenant, and decisively in raising Jesus Christ from the dead for humanity's salvation. In this sense, *dikaiosyne theou* in its genitive form means that God's own activity and nature are bestowed on humanity out of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, humanity cannot control this divine quality—it is a gift which cannot be separated from its

⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 43.

⁸ Danker, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 247 (see chap. 2, n. 32).

⁹ See Robert Jewett, *Romans: Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 272. Jewett emphasizes that "the main theme of Romans, God's righteousness, which was announced in 1:16 and reiterated in 3:5, appears primarily in the sense of God's saving activity in the crucified Christ that sets the world right."

¹⁰ Victor P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 144–5.

giver.¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann emphasizes this point by showing that Paul's understanding of "the righteousness of God means that it is a gift which is conferred upon humanity on the basis of God's free grace alone. Paul speaks of God's righteousness because its one and only foundation is God's grace—it is God-given, God-adjudicated righteousness."¹²

We see in Kasemann and Bultmann an emerging, cosmic divine righteousness which is inclusive in scope. This universal scope has been opaque to Western New Testament scholarship, partly because of its focus on individualism and a denial of the formation of a global Christian community. In more recent New Testament exegesis, however, Philip Esler has proposed a hermeneutical framework of interpersonal communication and communion¹³ through which we can begin to appreciate the role of God's divine grace and consequently what God accomplished in Abraham.¹⁴ Thus, Θεου should be read as a genitive of origin, and δικαιοσύνη refers to humanity's righteous status which is the result of God's justifying grace. In Paul's reinterpretation, God's righteousness is his own covenantal loyalty which was probably a mystery to his first creation activities. Paul uses Abraham to expand the scope of Israel's understanding to involve the entire universe.¹⁵ Cross-culturally, Θεού is for Paul God's sovereignty over the world revealing itself eschatologically in Jesus Christ. It is the rightful power with which God makes his cause to triumph in the world which has not only fallen from him but is under the power of an imperialistic grip. Yet, the world is and will remain his creation and his inviolable possession, so through his power God's authority over his creation will still be manifested. In any case we should pay attention to Kasemann's

¹¹ Ernest Kasemann, "The Righteousness of God in Paul" in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 168–82.

¹² Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, 1951), 285.

¹³ Philip Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 273–82. In terms of this notion of "communion and community," the righteousness of God abolishes "covenantal nomism," a term that describes the way the Jews viewed their relation to God. For an elaboration of this concept see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 511–23. See also Romans 2:12–6 where Paul articulates the notion of the righteousness by faith as opposed to righteousness by works.

¹⁴ See also Charles H. Talbert, *Romans: Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2002), 105–12.

¹⁵ This concept is elaborated by J. A. Ziesler in *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 187, 206.

notion of incorporating “the subjective genitive and the genitive of origin,” for in this the righteousness of God remains his prerogative.¹⁶

Read in this way, the righteousness of God abolishes imperialistic readings of Romans and creates a universal community based on grace. Western scholarship, with its emphasis on individual salvation, refuses to enter sympathetically and imaginatively into a reading that challenges imperialistic and colonial readings. Culturally and religiously it is hard for us to understand the struggles of mid-first-century Roman readers as they heard Paul’s letter being read for the first time in their house churches. What difference, for example, did Paul’s notion of ‘God’s righteousness’ make to both Greco-Roman and Jewish listeners struggling with fictive kinship terms? What difference did it make to Gentile Christians living in the capital where the propaganda of Augustus depicted the ruler as the elect Savior of Providence and the iconic benefactor of the world? And what difference does Paul’s answer to these first-century Greco-Roman issues make to us in a postcolonial world?

After surveying and analyzing the concept of ‘God’s righteousness,’ we can now identify the *work* of the “righteousness of God.” With Paul’s understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the righteousness of God is viewed as reversing the conventional wisdom at work in the first-century imperial context and within the debate about election within Second Temple Judaism. In both contexts, the worldview was divided between honor and shame. However, the death of Jesus Christ demonstrated the expansiveness of God’s righteousness which created a new community. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God restored the “entire cosmic order” by reconciling nationalities to himself.¹⁷ In Romans 1:16–7, Paul hints at the framework we need to proceed, where he talks about the power of God at work in the gospel. For Paul, the gospel is the shameful story of one who was crucified in weakness, yet in him God’s righteousness was revealed. Thus,

¹⁶ A final facet which Kasemann detects in Paul’s concept is God’s faithfulness, not only to Israel but to the whole creation; it is that faithfulness with which the Creator persists in his work of creation, in spite of, and beyond, the failures of his creatures and with which he preserves his creation and gives it a new foundation. This is well summarized by S. K. Williams in his article, “The Righteousness of God in Romans,” in *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 244.

¹⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 273.

the gospel itself is the operation of God's power working towards salvation¹⁸ for people in both honorable and shameful positions.

It is crucial to realize that the apostle is responding pointedly to a cultural distortion of his gospel of grace. He challenges social, cultural, religious, and political ideologies at work in the Greco-Roman world of the Augustan Era. Could it be that Paul's presentation of the righteousness of God coupled with grace and faith is aimed at confronting the Julio-Claudian rulers who had appointed themselves mediators of divine favor to all people? Scholars such as Karl P. Donfried continue to miss one of the major issues in this letter, namely the original audience to whom Romans was sent.¹⁹ We must remember that Paul was addressing not only Christians but also the Roman Capital. Rome prided itself on being the capital of justice, the source from which justice would flow throughout the world.²⁰ It is to this capital that Paul is writing about the righteousness of God, a counter challenge to the Julian-Claudian rulers. The Roman goddess *Iustitia*, like the Caesar cult itself, was a comparative novelty in Paul's world; the temple to *Iustitia*, was established on January 8, 13 C.E., and *Iustitia* was among the virtues celebrated by Augustus's famous *clips virtutis*, the golden shield set up in the senate house and inscribed with the emperor's virtues (27 B.C.E.).²¹

The way Paul interprets the righteousness of God must have been quite astonishing to his readers. The concept had its roots in the Jewish world view referring to the covenant faithfulness of the creator God. However, Paul's declaration that the gospel of King Jesus reveals God's righteousness must also be read as a well orchestrated challenge to the imperial rule. Paul is saying to his Roman audience, if you are hungry and thirsty for justice, you will no longer find it in the εὐαγγέλιον

¹⁸ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 28.

¹⁹ See Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate*, rev. and expanded ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001). In this collection of essays, it is surprising that not even one of the New Testament scholars attempted to highlight a political reading of Romans. They all seem to recycle the conventional understanding of Romans that has been in place since the Enlightenment.

²⁰ N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introductory, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 404.

²¹ *Ibid.*

that announces Augustus as Lord,²² but in the *euangelion* of Jesus the Son of God. This point is illustrated in every part of Romans. The Roman claim of putting to right the entire creation was met with a counter-cultural ideology. In other words, the Augustan ideology that happiness and peace is won by military victories²³ was met with the righteousness of God—a righteousness that was revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We should pause for a moment and think of what Caesar's *Iustitia*²⁴ had claimed to do, namely putting to right the entire creation. In Isaiah 4–55, a similar ideology is hinted at: Israel's God will reveal righteousness and salvation, thus confronting the ruling empire as the sovereign creator and rescuing the covenant people in the process.

The righteousness of God informs us of God's faithful nature; the gospel reveals that in Jesus Christ, the God of the universe was true to the covenant established with Abraham. In a world where a chosen people rebel and are unfaithful to their "chosen-ness,"²⁵ God has, through the faithful Abraham (and subsequently Jesus), created a new family marked by the covenant sign of faith. Thus, Romans points to a deeper and more foundational motif. If Paul is to address the problems of kinship between all nations, he must go down to those deep roots—to creation and the fall, covenant and Torah, to Israel's failure and God's covenant faithfulness. He must show how the death and resurrection of Jesus are God's way of reconciling ethnic groups and

²² See P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, eds., *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 18–37.

²³ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), 183–5. See also chapter 4 in Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis*. The same idea is well elaborated in Richard A. Horsely, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 148–57.

²⁴ The ancient Romans did not refer to the righteousness of their deities, the god *Iustitias*/Δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) but the notion surfaces in the Augustan period in celebration of the Roman imperial cult. See Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome: Classical World Series* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 81. Here we are told that if Augustus's perception was to reshape Roman self awareness, to transform the perception of what 'being Roman' meant and the accepted values which held the Roman state together, a transformation of religious awareness was a vital element. He revived traditional Roman religious practices and values, but in such a way as to place himself at the center of the system.

²⁵ God's righteousness abolishes privileges through which those in power define righteousness. In Jesus Christ, divine righteousness acts to counter the arrogance of dominant groups in different cultures of the world.

nations and how those events brought about a new *ethnos* led by God's spirit and defined by faith.

Thus, Abraham and, subsequently, Jesus are the lenses through which the world may perceive the original and ultimate saving plan of God. The Roman Empire promoted justice/righteousness by rewarding Roman citizens with the privileges of the empire in response to its surpassing virtue and piety.²⁶ But in this process the weak were left out, because the "system allowed no equality between provincials and Rome."²⁷ As we discovered above in the notion of 'shame and honor,' imperial righteousness meant favoritism to those who were promoting the ideals of the empire. This goes against Paul's concept of divine righteousness.

In Paul's view, God's righteousness represents the supreme expression of God's love and purpose, fully revealed in Christ Jesus, the ultimate Savior. In other words, grace and God's faithfulness were demonstrated in the atonement as the fulfillment of the covenant and are the underlying dynamic. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, salvation through faith was opened to all groups, even those who lacked qualifications.²⁸ Paul is making it plain to the empire that the death of Jesus was an event for all people, and all humanity is able to relate to God on the basis of faith. In Romans 3:27–31 Paul affirms that God deals impartially with both Jews and Gentiles. Three aspects are prominent in Paul's approach. Romans 1:17 and 3:21 focus on God's righteousness as his saving activity whereby he shows his covenantal faithfulness; in 3:22 it becomes clear that this activity bestows his righteousness on all who have faith in Christ, setting them in a relationship with him.²⁹ Thus, God's impartiality constitutes his very integrity (justice, righteousness, and covenantal loyalty) which exists apart from the law (Rom 3:21).³⁰

The focal point for Paul is the death of Jesus Christ, which manifests God's eschatological breakthrough. In this eschatological moment

²⁶ Jewett, *Romans*, 276.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, "From Wrath to Justification: Tradition, Gospel, and Audience in the Theology of Romans 1:18–4:25," in David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 146. See also Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 23–34.

³⁰ See Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis*, 17–8, 79–97.

(Νὺν δέ) God's righteousness is made available "beyond the covenant people and is valid for everyone who believes in Jesus the crucified. Indirectly this says that God's covenant faithfulness becomes his faithfulness to his whole creation and his right which is established in this relationship."³¹ Thus, Christ's faithfulness is the means through which God has manifested his righteousness (his faithfulness to his promise), for by his faithfulness Christ opened up a new mode of existence allowing all nations to stand justified before God. The death and resurrection of Jesus was a confirmation of the righteousness of God. Christ then stands as a means of expiation, through which all nations are able to receive God's favor.³²

If this view is correct, it is likely that Paul saw in the expiation an allusion to God's fidelity to his promise to Abraham, a promise that centers on the blessing granted to all nations through the death of one individual. Here we see a truncated understanding of the intersection of divine righteousness and grace. Thus, God's setting humanity right becomes a matter of χάρις or grace, which is translated as the free, gracious favor of God, the love he bestows on humanity while they are in their fallen nature.

Our quest for the righteousness of God in Romans should remind us that Paul's audience consisted of Gentile converts (Rom 1:13, 11:13) living in the capital where the imperial ruler resided. The imperial propaganda promoted a symbolic universe in which Augustus—the iconic Roman ruler who, in the view of posterity, had dispensed overflowing grace and righteousness—was installed as the divinely elected vice regent of the gods.³³ On the Mausoleum of Augustus,³⁴ he is depicted as the *telos* of world history in a manner reminiscent of Paul's portrayal of Christ as the *telos* of the Jewish quest for Torah righteousness (Rom 10:4).

In Paul's portrayal of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we witness a collision of symbolic universes that lifts divine election from timeless theology to something more germane for first-century Romans. Through the grace of God, Gentiles could immediately be incorporated

³¹ Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 101.

³² Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis*, 46.

³³ See *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 2, 3.

³⁴ See Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome: World Classical Series* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 51ff.

as siblings into the household of Abraham as opposed to being only, in select cases, clients of the household of Caesar and of his freedmen (Phil 4:22; Rom 16:11b). The faith dimension of how Jews and Gentiles were supposed to live in kinship has been explored, but the imperial context of grace, faith, and righteousness as it relates to the role of Abraham has been overlooked. This is where we will begin our survey of Abraham as the ancestor of faith to all believers.

It is crucial for New Testament readers to see 3:21–30 as Paul’s litmus test of the righteousness of God. In this great passage, Paul emphatically insists that because God is one, he is the God of Gentiles as well as Jews (3:29–30).³⁵ The oneness of God is tied directly to the one way God justifies by faith.³⁶ A passage that begins with “righteousness of God” ends with the pronouncement “Jews and Gentiles, through faith.” By justifying Gentiles by faith and not by works of the law, God removes any human barriers to the Gentiles’ realization of the divine blessing. Thus, God keeps his promise to Abraham.

It is to Abraham and the promise that Paul turns in Romans 4. Although the term ‘righteousness’ does not appear in Romans 4, its implications are evident throughout the chapter. The theme of God’s righteousness starts with Abraham’s call in Genesis 12:1–3. He was called while living in an idolatrous land. God’s call of Abraham may be described as a divine strategy in the service of a universal purpose, namely the salvation of the world that had fallen under the sway of human sin and its disastrous effects. Abraham is an initially exclusive divine choice for the sake of a maximally inclusive end. Next, we will examine the figure of Abraham and his faithful relationship with God in Romans 4.

A New Faith Community Through Abraham in Romans 4

We begin this section by answering the great question found in Romans 4: Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν εὐρηκέναι Ἀβραά τον προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα. I contend that this question is both open ended and closed. In the context of the dialogue between Paul and the Jewish interlocutor, Abraham plays two roles. First, he is the celebrated ancestor of the Jews—the

³⁵ Williams, “The Righteousness of God in Romans,” 278.

³⁶ Ibid.

“primary founder of a family—an ancestor”³⁷ of a group. Using Abraham as a model corresponds to the Jewish tradition of closely connecting Abraham and Moses. In addition, Isaiah 51:2 emphatically calls the patriarch “our father.” Second, he is the focal point of the emerging Christian self-identification in its relationship with and departure from other early Jewish interpretations.

Thus, what Abraham founded in the context of Romans was not the Jewish nation, but a new *ethnos* related to God on the basis of faith. The question to investigate centers not only on what Abraham founded but on how God seeks to enter into a kinship relationship with the whole universe. Thus, God is ‘kin’ with all humanity. In other words, we can rewrite the question in 4:1 to read as follows: What did God see in Abraham that made him choose him to be the foundational spiritual ancestor? Our effort in answering this question will lead us to a point where other tribal and ancestral nations can begin to appropriate Abraham as the true ancestor of all who have faith.

God and Abraham play complementary roles in this process, in that the future is not shaped simply by God who calls and promises but also by Abraham who responds (Gen 22:15–8). The relationship between God and Abraham is first and foremost based on the faith/*pistis* of both parties.³⁸ Thus, what Abraham found was a God who not only established a relationship with him, but also made and fulfilled promises. Stanley Stowers provides impetus for the thesis of this book in his analysis of Romans 4:1–25. In the words of Stowers, Abraham serves as a model not of the believer’s saving faith but rather of how God brings to pass his promises by founding lineages that incorporate whole peoples into the blessings made possible by the founding ancestor.³⁹ However, Stowers’s work does not yet offer modern day cross-cultural readers a clear picture of the role and function of ancestors.

Stowers argues that the issue in Romans is not how God saves the generic human being, but rather how peoples establish a kinship with

³⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 873.

³⁸ See “The Apocalypse of Abraham 9:1–10,” in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 693. See also Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham—Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 24–47.

³⁹ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 227.

God and with one another.⁴⁰ I contend that Stowers's work is incomplete, because it does not address the complementary roles of God and Abraham. It is important to note that Abraham's God is a down-to-earth God. In Genesis and in the *Testament of Abraham* we see God appearing at the tent door in the form of a human being who eats with Abraham. Not only that, but God enters into a dialogue with Abraham about the future of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁴¹ Thus, Abraham's God takes human participation seriously, engaging what Abraham says and does.

As we discovered earlier in our discussion of the "righteousness of God," kinship is possible through grace—grace revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In chapters two, three, and four, I explained the role that founders play, especially in Paul's theology. Through the role and function of ancestors, we are able to establish a connectional link between early Christianity and traditional cultures whose identities are shaped by collective memories. The ancient literature of Virgil and Dionysius of Halicarnassus provides us with a paradigm for a cross-cultural reading of Romans. In establishing the role of faith, we need to revisit Paul's appropriation of the Aeneas ideology.

Virgil, the Augustan poet, popularized the tradition of Aeneas as the ancestor of Greek upper classes and Roman nobles.⁴² Aeneas was a symbol of Rome's moral and religious values; he inspired people with a patriotic vision of a world whose eschatological fulfillment was embodied in the Augustan identification with the return of the Golden Age.⁴³ Drawing Aeneas into the historical horizon of Pauline exegesis will enable us to appreciate the contextual world in which Paul did his mission work, consequently providing us with exegetical lenses through which we can read Romans to faith communities in Zimbabwe.

⁴⁰ Ibid. See also T. P. Wiseman who provides the modern day cross-cultural reader with the best insight into disputes and claims for Aeneas as an ancestor of Greeks and Romans in *The Myths of Rome*, 11–21.

⁴¹ See Genesis 18:1–2, 16–32. See also Michael E. Stone, trans., *The Testament of Abraham: The Greek Recension 2* (Missoula, MT: University of Montana, 1972), 2–23. In the *Testament*, God sends the angel Michael to tell Abraham about his death. The events following this revelation show the reader that God values human participation greatly, especially the participation of Abraham.

⁴² See chapter one of this book.

⁴³ Palmer-Bonz, *The Past as Legacy*, 38–9 (see chap. 1, n. 108).

We must take into account the attitudes of Paul's public in order to appreciate the importance of the Aeneas and Abraham comparison; that is, in making sense of Pauline exegesis, we must ask how his audience viewed the world, how the hearers and readers of the writings of Paul were shaped essentially through the Hellenistic Diaspora synagogues which were present both in Asia from which Paul was writing and in the Roman capital of the Augustan period. Commentaries and exegesis have not fully taken into account the complex cultural milieu of ancient Christian communities. This is one of the contributions of this study, especially in assisting cross-cultural Christian communities who struggle daily with faith issues.

The most important document to take as an intertext with Romans may be the Augustus document known as the *Res Gestae Augusti*. The significance of this contemporary imperial text for the letters of Paul is obvious because the concepts *dikaiosyne* and *pistis* appear several times in the Greek translation found on the outside walls of temples dedicated to Augustus, and Paul and his reading public would have noticed this. These concepts are central in the Epistle to the Romans. The Greek terms *epiekei*, *arête*, and *eirene*, which are very familiar in Paul, are also found in the *Res Gestae Augusti*. Peace and peacemaking are essential elements of the gospel of Augustus.⁴⁴

As shown in chapter one, Aeneas is a disciplined instrument of destiny, and is elevated as a symbol, which separates him from ordinary humanity.⁴⁵ On one level he is the ancestor of the Alban kings and of Romulus through the Julian *gens*.⁴⁶ However, he is not only the ancestor of these two great lines, but also the parent of the Roman people who are sometimes called the *Aeneidae*.⁴⁷ Aeneas is essentially a cultural construct who functions as a symbol of unity for Greeks and Romans. Thus, Aeneas and Abraham contributed to the formation of societies. Since Abraham's faith is the focus of this chapter, we must now examine how the society he founded was much wider than the one Aeneas established.

⁴⁴ Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome*, 145.

⁴⁵ Moses Hadas, "Aeneas and the Tradition of the National Hero," *AJP* 69 (1948): 408–14.

⁴⁶ Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome*, 146.

⁴⁷ Virgil, *Aen.* VIII, 648. On the status of Aeneas and Rome in general, see James G. Farrow, "Aeneas and Rome," *The Classics Journal* 87 (1992): 339–59.

The faith/trust of Abraham is the central characteristic of Paul's understanding of the spiritual ancestry of Abraham. The faith Paul writes about in Romans 4 is not loyalty to an imperial figure but loyalty to the God of Abraham. Paul here is advocating a new *ethnos*, of which he is a part. By highlighting the figure of Abraham, Paul emphatically describes his present life in Christ Jesus. His conversion to Christianity is now a paradigm for all cross-cultural Christians. When Paul uses words such as ἐργάζεσθαι (which refers to "work performed in order to accomplish something"),⁴⁸ he is referring to his conversion which came simply through the grace of God. This grace according to Paul exemplified itself in Abraham who, in his ungodliness, received God's promises without working to earn them. In response to God's promises, Abraham simply believed, and it was reckoned or counted to him as righteousness.

Thus, because of his faith, Abraham becomes the "honorific parent of all believers, explicitly including those unconnected to his physical lineage."⁴⁹ As shown in chapter two, Philo also depicted Abraham as the prototype of faith, thus taking over the Jewish tradition that regarded the patriarch as "our Father." Here we see Paul operating within the same context, but moving out of that context by making Abraham the ancestor of the Christian faith as well.⁵⁰ I concur with Kasemann that Paul's new way of looking at Abraham signals a new faith paradigm that shifts Abraham from Jewish ground, thus removing the patriarch from his prior context.⁵¹ Although himself a Jew, Paul shifts the paradigm so that Abraham becomes father of all kinship groups, not just the Jews. The privileged position of the Jews and Gentile proselytes is no longer a thing to boast about.

We must remember that what Paul reveals in Romans 4:1–25 are the implications of Abraham's faith and God's righteousness. Paul moves Abraham beyond the earlier Jewish way of talking about him as a symbol of national identity. The death and resurrection of Jesus has brought about something new; now all people who have the faith of Abraham are able to appropriate the patriarch as an ancestor. However, Paul cannot be removed from his Jewish culture. What has happened, instead, is that within his own cultural context, Paul sees

⁴⁸ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 389.

⁴⁹ Jewett, *Romans*, 307.

⁵⁰ See Ernst Kasemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

God's righteousness being revealed on the cross of Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul sees Abraham's role in a new way. He turns to Genesis 15:6 and wrestles with the issue of when Abraham was "reckoned righteous." It is a crucial question for Paul, as it determines his discovery of the righteousness of God, and at the same time his grand mission within the Gentile community. Paul refutes circumcision as a prerequisite for inclusion in God's family. With this ritual out of the way, Paul regards Abraham as a representative figure of faith whose destiny embraces the destiny of others, because the blessing pronounced upon him now also applies to all who follow his faith.⁵²

In Romans, Paul reveals a new system of ascribing righteousness—by the grace of Jesus Christ. Grace takes away the prerogative of circumcision, and consequently of human boasting.⁵³ In other words, divine grace is not only favor granted but is also power unleashed to all nations. Therefore, in Romans 3:21–4:25 we are confronted with the universal need for salvation and the power of grace as it extends to the whole universe. For Paul, righteousness is the gift of a new relationship with God that comes when humans stop competing for honor and accept the grace they could never earn.⁵⁴ To be "reckoned as righteousness" is to be accepted by the God of righteousness and, therefore, to be granted honor that overturns shameful status.⁵⁵ This is so apparent in the narrative of Abraham and Sarah, beginning with Abraham's call and continuing throughout the story. We will return to this, but for now it suffices to say that grace stands at the beginning of the Abraham and Sarah story. In no sense is Abraham being rewarded for his merit, but for his belief in all God's promises.

When we look at Genesis 15:1–6, we discover that it is an oracle of salvation with the following aspects: God's word comes to Abraham with a pledge of salvation and prosperity.⁵⁶ In his human nature Abraham grieves twice, and God responds with a pledge of a consanguineous heir and confirmation with a sign. In the end, Abraham believes.

⁵² The faith we are talking about in this chapter is not solely Christian faith but is faith that can be exercised in all religions that claim Abraham as an ancestor of faith. These religions include Islam, Judaism, and Christianity as well as African traditional and other religions whose focus is on faith.

⁵³ Barret, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 84–5.

⁵⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, 312.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See C. Westerman, *The Promise to the Fathers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 15. See also *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (London: Epworth, 1965), 64.

The same aspects of the oracle of salvation are also seen in Deutero-Isaiah, especially those prophecies that refer to Abraham (Isaiah 41:8–13 and 51:1–8). These verses support Israel's conviction of its election as God's people by referring to the call of Abraham and Israel's return from Haran. However, the word of salvation is not addressed to Abraham in the past; rather, the righteousness of God is being exercised now in the present in his reaffirmation of Israel in the future rescue from enemies (Isa 41:11–2).

Abraham is called God's friend⁵⁷ not in a passive form, but in an active sense (he who loves me). The relationship between the righteousness of God as his present saving action for Israel and Israel's election in Abraham is even stronger in Isaiah 51:1–8. I intend to show readers of Romans 4:1–25 two things. First, God acted righteously not only toward the historical Abraham, but also toward future generations. Second, emphasis should not be placed on Abraham's merits or works but on the free grace of God—the righteousness of God given to the believing children of Abraham.

What then is 'faith,' based on our investigation of Paul's interpretation of Scripture? As a student caught between the cross-cultural realms of Euro-Americanism and neocolonialism, I am tempted to say that faith is grace—that is, the liberating and empowering characteristic of God which enters into human beings, thereby separating them from all imperial lords, and putting them in a posture of trust. Caught in the dilemma of colonialism and Western approaches to life, I realize that faith means placing all my hopes in God alone. Faith is both despair in the human capacity to save and hope in the saving act of God.⁵⁸ Faith has an equalizing dimension in that it gives all of humanity access to God. However, faith takes two forms: it can be an individual exercise, but at the same time it can be born in a community where God is able to form a new thing.⁵⁹ In Paul's view, the essential ingredients of faith are trust and belief. When God promised, Abraham trusted, and that made Abraham righteous and consequently ensured his spiritual ancestorship of both Jews and Greeks.⁶⁰

God's promises stand at the beginning of Abraham's search for the true God (Gen 12:1–3; *Apoc. Ab.* 9:1–10), creating his faith and

⁵⁷ *I Clement*, X. 1–7.

⁵⁸ Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 169.

⁵⁹ Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 109.

⁶⁰ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 228.

generating the basic shape of his life. God's promises are decisive for the future of Abraham and his family, and through them, all the world's families. I contend that Abraham leaving his Gentile home and embarking on a journey to search for one God is not the origin of one particular religion; rather, it should be seen as the new birth of faith—a new way of actualizing how creatures relate to God. Romans 4 demonstrates clearly the new meaning of faith. 'Faith' to Paul is more than being religious; it is not something that Christians, Muslims, and Jews can exhibit in their own respective spheres, but is inherently a universal experience.⁶¹

Individuals, on the other hand, are expected to participate in the community of those who share 'faith.' We can surmise that Paul envisions faith having a creative effect; believers are given a new status, allowing them to participate in this new reality. In this case, faith does not assume a religious attitude or a Christian virtue, but rests solely on the divine promises made to Abraham. Thus, God's promises cannot "be replaced by human institutions, theologies and convictions, even when these interpret themselves as being the documentations of that Lord."⁶² God remains the only one who acts towards us in his Word, and our response to him is measured simply in our trust. Faith is pleasing to God if we follow the good example of Abraham, and by believing we will be rewarded and justified like Abraham. In Romans 4, Paul says that God's grace is exhibited toward those who have no claim to honor, and by this means "God establishes a new relationship between God's self and the community of those who accept grace without any claim of having earned it."⁶³

We must note that Paul's interest is not only in Abraham but in all who will exhibit the faith of the founding figure. Secondly, Paul's interest is in God's activity in "counting to Abraham for righteousness," and Paul perceives in this passage "the gospel proclaimed beforehand to Abraham," the gospel which says that "God would justify the Gentiles from faithfulness" (Gal 3:8). The phrase *ἐκ πίστεως* refers to those who will be counted in the community of Abraham's children. In this verse, I suggest that Paul hears not a statement about the righteousness of Abraham's faith but a promise for the future, and a promise which

⁶¹ See Dunn, *Romans 1–8: Word Biblical Commentary*, 191–2.

⁶² Kasemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, 82.

⁶³ Jewett, *Romans*, 315–6.

has specifically to do with Gentiles. What this entails is that Christ has redeemed us “in order that for the Gentiles the blessing of Abraham might become a reality in Jesus Christ, in order that we might receive the promise, that is, the spirit, through faithfulness” (Gal 3:13). “Gentiles” should be read as a universal metaphor referring to the plight of all human beings.

As an ancestor, Abraham’s example legitimates the acceptability of Gentiles who will respond to the message of unconditional grace in Christ Jesus. Everyone who believes like Abraham will become righteous and be honored before the throne of grace. The interpretation of Genesis 15:6 is made much richer in Romans 4:1–25, where Paul speaks of God’s grace toward faithful people, not just toward Abraham. This is explicitly stated in Romans 4:23–4: “These words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake only but also for our sake, to whom it is to be counted.” These words indicate that the righteousness of God is being extended to all nations, races, and sexes.⁶⁴ In Romans, Paul constructs a new hermeneutic of faith,⁶⁵ a hermeneutic which can be applied to reading texts across cultures. With the centrality of words such as *pistis*, *dikaiosyne*, and *aletheia* of God, the whole letter appeals for the inclusion of all people on the basis of God’s faithfulness to his promises concerning his people. At the end of the letter we read that “Christ became a servant to the circumcised for the sake of God’s faithfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”

Thus, Romans 4 is not about Christian faith only, but is simply about the exercise of faith (faith in One who raises the dead [Rom 4:17–9]), and it speaks forcefully about Abraham’s faithfulness. *Pistis* is parallel to “promise” in verse 14 and to “grace” in verse 16, and must refer to God’s faithfulness to his promise, as does the phrase “God’s righteousness” (that is, his faithfulness in verse 13). In my judgment, the whole chapter is not about faith but grace, expressed in the constantly recurring phrase that God “counts righteousness” to Abraham’s heirs (vs. 5, 6, 9, 23, 24), and that according to grace. The content of the promise which Abraham believed was that “he should be the heir of the world” (v.13), again in the tradition of Sir 44. The promise of Gen 15:5—“thus

⁶⁴ See Richard Hays, “Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 107–15.

⁶⁵ Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutic of Faith*, 169.

will your seed be”—is interpreted in light of Gen 17:5: “I have made you the father of many Gentiles.” This means that God is faithful as God gives life to the Gentiles who are dead in their sins and calls into being others who do not exist (vs. 17). Thus, Abraham’s faith is not an existential abstraction, but it has a specific content (the future justification of nations), and it seems that it has this meaning for Paul also in Genesis 15:6.

Thus, in Romans 4, Abraham is not a type of believer, but he is the spiritual ancestor of later believers, Jews and Gentiles alike. The decisive moment in God’s plan for salvation is Abraham’s trust in God’s promise to him (Rom 4:3, Gal 3:6), which God in turn credits as an act of virtue, akin to God’s own integrity, since faithfulness is also one of God’s traits, as Paul notes in 1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18). Faith/trust in God is such a virtue that God counts. That alone caused Paul to focus on Abraham who was in fact a Gentile when God credited his trust as virtue—he was not yet circumcised (Rom 4:9–11). Circumcision was a symbol after the fact of Abraham’s decisive act of trust. Paul further notes the corollary that this credit is the equivalent of “the Lord not taking into account sin,” quoting Psalms 32:2 (Rom 4:8). In God’s accounting system, trust/faith counts against sin, even for Gentiles like Abraham.

After examining all the graciousness and righteousness of God, Paul then deduces that Abraham’s act of trust can be a paradigm for everyone who has that kind of trust (Rom 4:24), Jew and non-Jew alike. God’s promise to Abraham is thus *inherited* by those who exhibit that kind of trust (Rom 4:16). In fact, these dual tracks thereby fulfill the promise itself that Abraham would be “the ancestor of many nations/gentiles” (Gen 17:5), quoted also in Romans 4:17. Indeed, this then fulfills the original promise made to Abraham, that through him “all nations will be blessed” (Gal 3:8). Paul’s solution to the human plight addresses four main concerns. First, it maintains God’s integrity, that is, God is one as all Jews affirm. Second, God keeps promises, and holds everyone accountable, and at the same time is an impartial God. Third, God’s impartiality allows Gentiles to be included in the plan of salvation. Fourth, God recognizes total trust as the link between Abraham and other Gentiles.

Total trust brings life. In their old age, Abraham and Sarah were “as good as dead” when new life came to them—an indication of what happens to those who totally trust that God can do what God has promised (Rom 4:19, 21). The ultimate act of such trust for Paul was Jesus’s

total trust in God, who raised him from among the dead (Rom 4:24, 8:11; Gal 1:1). As a result, the promise to Abraham that all humankind would be blessed through him is now fully available to everyone on the basis of trust (Gal 3:22). God's very integrity is linked to Jesus's total trust in God, who holds in equal regard everyone who has that kind of trust, since God does not discriminate (Rom 3:22, 26). Scripture also provides Paul with a motto that links together these key concepts and becomes central in Paul's argument (Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11): "Those acceptable to God, based on total trust, will have life" (Hab 2:4). This motto connects both Abraham and Jesus to every person who exhibits total trust. In fact, the whole process begins and ends with trust (Rom 1:17).

Paul also edits another favorite text. Psalm 143:2 states that "no mortals will be acceptable (considered virtuous) to God," and Paul interprets this to mean "based on their distinctive ethnic practices" (Rom 3:20). Paul's fuller explanation is that people will be acceptable to God only through a total trust like that of Abraham, and consequently of Jesus, God's Anointed. The Mosaic Law itself is not based on trust, since "those who observe its requirements will live by them" (Lev 18:5, quoted in Rom 10:5, 7:10, and also in Gal 3:12). Thus, it is not distinctive ethnic practices that make people acceptable to God; rather, it is their confidence in God's Anointed, who exemplified total trust. Paul asks the Galatians a rhetorical question, which he surely thinks applies to all persons of faith: "Did you receive the spirit based on your distinctive ethnic practices or based on completely trusting what you heard?" (Gal 3:2, 5). The answer is provided by the faith story of Abraham in Romans 4:1–25. It is important that Romans fulfills what Paul began in Galatians.⁶⁶ In other words, we cannot understand Romans without comprehending what Paul grappled with in the Galatian churches.

Another way to talk about this same principle is through the language of obedience. "One person's obedience made vindication possible for others," in the same way that a "single just act brought everyone acquittal for life" (Rom 5:18–9). Paul thus can describe his mission as promoting "faithful obedience" (Rom 1:5). Whole-hearted obedience shifts one's allegiance from sin to divine justice (Rom 6:16–7),

⁶⁶ See Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9–11* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 3–22.

consequently leading to divine grace. For Paul, allegiance to the principle of faith means that the ritual of baptism amounts to sharing in the death of God's Anointed, Jesus, which anticipates sharing in his life, also (Gal 6:3–8, 2:19–20).

The understanding Paul has achieved allows him to explain the death of Jesus as fitting into God's plan of salvation. Because of Jesus's death, even non-Jews can share in Abraham's blessing, which means they receive the promise through Jesus's act of obedience (Gal 3:14). The curse of Jesus's scandalous kind of death—"hanging on a tree" (obedience to the point of death on a cross [Phil 2:8])—amounted to "buying us back from a curse," the way a slave is bought back from its master. Because this death exemplified total trust, it is an act of love for those who share in it (Gal 2:20) and thus participate in the blessing and promise to Abraham.

Paul relishes this "scandal of the cross" (Gal 5:11), making what appears to be accursed turn out to bring redemption. For Paul, the conviction that "God raised Jesus from the dead" meant that the curse of the cross was turned into a blessing, fulfilling the promise to Abraham that through him all people would be blessed. The foundation was Abraham's trust, which was counted as virtue. Paul's insights and argument reflect his indebtedness to Scripture, using it in its Greek translation; yet his logical outcome seems to make the law unnecessary. Since the Mosaic Law came 430 years after Abraham, it cannot annul the promise God made in the covenant with Abraham. That promise was based on total trust (Gal 3:17–8, 22), and if God is indeed trustworthy, then that promise is still valid. The law that came later did provide the discipline necessary to restrain sin, but it did so by putting everyone under the curse of the law. That condition changed only after Jesus reversed the curse through his faithful obedience.

The law itself is not based on trust, and it cannot make anyone virtuous (Rom 8:3–4). It cannot count trust as virtue, the way God did for Abraham. At the same time, trust does not invalidate the law (Rom 3:31). The law contains God's promise (often in story form) and also God's demands, which humans disobey. But anyone who has already experienced vindication through total trust has no need to keep distinctive ethnic practices. On the other hand, those who adopt the traditional customs come under the threat of the law's curse and become obligated to adhere to all its prescriptions (Gal 5:2–6). The law was effective, however, in calling attention to sin (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:19).

Keeping the customs prescribed in the Mosaic tradition allows those in the covenant to maintain their status as members of the covenant. However, the law contains no basis for claiming that God's promises are available to other people only if they adopt these distinctive ethnic practices. Such favoritism would invalidate God's impartiality. Nothing less than God's own trustworthiness is at stake for Paul. Paul's analysis of the human condition and his solution to the problem allow him to affirm his commitment to faith and to express it in universal terms. For Paul this is the best solution for all nations and races. God's righteousness opened doors for others to be counted as his children. The process began with Abraham, to whom God related on the basis of faith.

Thus, the formulation *προπάτορα ἡμῶν* seals the new 'in-group identity' of those who accept the message that God views everyone on the basis of grace and faith. Secondly, the formulation establishes that God was and remains the God of the 'ungodly.' Whether circumcised or not, all are Abraham's children and recipients of the righteousness that comes through faith alone. Thus, what we see unfolding in Romans 4 is the expansion of the technical term 'ancestor' to that of a spiritual ancestor. Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of other peoples because their destiny is prefigured in him. Therefore, every believer's faith should mirror Abraham's faith. In this text, Paul notes the strength of Abraham's faith and establishes a hermeneutic of faith which is universal in scope (Rom 4:13–4; Gal 3:8–9). The inheritance given to Abraham was *ἐκ πίστεως* in order that everything else might be based on grace.

In conclusion, we might say that the promise and power that came to Abraham and Sarah was not according to flesh but according to grace. Grace in this case refers to God's faithfulness. The story of Abraham is thus presented as a divinely plotted drama whose theme is Abraham as the spiritual ancestor of both Jews and Gentiles. The destiny of all believers is bound up in Abraham. Thus, Paul's question in Romans 4:1 is both a cross-cultural and postcolonial question for all nations and peoples of the world. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will define faith from a postcolonial point of view. Secondly, I will seek to recapitulate the understanding of God and the Abraham figure which this study has uncovered. Lastly, I will briefly examine the implications of these discoveries for the people of Zimbabwe.

Faith and Grace Reconfigured: A Postcolonial Hermeneutic

We have noted that Abraham's act of believing is emphasized more in Romans than in any other text of the Old or New Testaments. In other words, we can surmise that faith becomes a merit. However, Paul is apparently not concerned with Abraham's righteousness or faith, but with God's grace towards those who could have the same faith as Abraham. What Abraham merited for later believing Jews and Gentiles is pure grace. What Paul is interested in is the development of a hermeneutic of faith and grace. These two crucial terms eliminate pride and prejudice on both religious and nationalistic fronts, and give shape to the rest of Romans. It is important, therefore, to pay close attention to exactly what 'faith' entails. Faith in Romans ceases to be a religious virtue and is instead a relational concept. Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome focuses on God's relationship to humankind, a story that started with one faithful individual. It is a story about creation and creature and their redemption by, in, and through Jesus Christ.⁶⁷ It is a story about a community of faith created out of the midst of fallen humanity.⁶⁸ It involves both tragedy and triumph, both the lost and the saved, both the first and the last.⁶⁹ Its focus is repeatedly on God's gracious acts towards all humanity.

It is from this story that we seek to define 'faith.' The Scriptures are quick to point out that "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). It is clear from this formulation that faith is a relational term, describing the proper stance that persons and groups should take in response to divine grace.⁷⁰ Thus, Abraham's belief in God placed him in a right relationship with God. In the presence of this deity, Abraham had faith, not only for himself but also for his descendants. Although the Scriptures do not clearly state this, we can infer that the pronouncement of Scripture applied not only to Abraham but also to other future believing nations. Thus, Abraham's act of believing can be characterized as vicarious in nature as it was inclusive of 'all' future believing generations. In other words, Abraham is not just an exemplary figure but an inclusive spiritual ances-

⁶⁷ Ben Witherington, III, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 333.

tor. Therefore, faith for Paul creates an entirely new perspective and standard of values that are available to all people. The word *πάς* is used nineteen times in Romans and is crucial in reference to what God did through Abraham. God's promise to Abraham established an inclusivity of all faithful nations in spite of their ethnic or religious standing.

Faith in this sense becomes a door through which humankind can enter into harmony with God. Humanity cannot cope with its fallenness apart from God; all that is needed is to be open to divine grace. This fundamental humility and willingness to depend on God (abandoning self-sufficiency and the effort to make oneself worthy) is faith in Paul's perspective.⁷¹ I share this perspective and offer a cross-cultural paradigm that views faith as a package including grace, mercy, and God's righteousness. Cross-culturally, faith is basic reality in the sense that it creates a new society (1 Cor 1:21, 2 Cor 5:5). Thus, in Abraham, a new creation was formed—a creation whose basic totem is faith. This is what believing in Christ means. This corporate body of faith has no ethnic boundaries, because Christ's death modified all the conventional and inherited distinctions. Faith communities are therefore the true posterity of Abraham, the final unity of humankind (Gal 3:6–9, 14, 29).

We may now revise the poignant words of Ernst Kasemann, "Abraham is the prototype of Christian faith which reads the justification of the ungodly, unmistakably and scandalously, in the message of the cross."⁷² In African terms, Abraham's faith, as the totem of a spiritual lineage, is paradoxical trust in the divine promise which contradicts every human expectation and ethnic boast; although it may seem to be an act of perversity and despair, for some incomprehensible reason it had a happy ending. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the paradoxical faith of Abraham was proved and justified. This is what happens when faith encounters the true God and surrenders to him. Most Third-World Christians are still held hostage by the Western form of faith which focuses on loyalty to those in power. In other words, it is a blind-folded form of faith—faith that is dependent on the creature rather than on God.

⁷¹ See Eph 2:8–9 where Paul succinctly says: "For by grace are we saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

⁷² Kasemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, 94.

In Romans, Paul advocates for liberating faith. And to call Abraham as *πατήρ πάντων ἡμῶν* means that all believers are included, regardless of their cultural, political, or theological orientation. Faith transcends our differences and pushes us to accept others. The life of faith is a Christ-possessed life, not one of striving for personal ideals, realizing ego capacities and self-aggrandizement. These attitudes are oppressive to others; they incapacitate the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That which began with Abraham and found its culmination in Jesus Christ continues in the modern day church, and will forever be a reality. Thus, Abraham and Jesus become icons of faith. Against all odds, Abraham believed in the promises of God—"he was confident about what the divine promise inspired in him."⁷³ Abraham like any other creature did not belong to himself; he always belonged to God whose power was manifested in and through him and his future posterity/offspring. Humanity, then, lives in and under the sphere of God. Abraham became the model of human believing. Therefore, faith is not some inner sanctimoniousness in contrast to external deeds; it is an unwavering reliance on God's promise, which issues in hope.⁷⁴ In trusting and believing in God, humans will discover hope. Once a creature believes, there is no space for self-reliance. Postcolonial readers can easily resonate with Abraham in that colonial and neocolonial challenges continue to haunt people, but what is needed is to be proactive and strong in faith.

Faith like grace has an equalizing effect. In Romans 9–11 Paul presents a theology of electing grace that ends all ethnic divisions and unites Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Rom 9:24, 10:12). Both nations were fallen and were to find in the historical outworking of electing grace the experience of divine mercy (Rom 11:28–32). In other words, elect Jews (as part of the remnant Israel) were still coming to faith by divine grace (Rom 9:6, 27; 11:1–7, 13–4). Thus, faith has a reconciling effect on all believers. Faith and the grace of God change the attitudes of nations. In any case, what Paul is doing is a scandalous exercise in that he is attacking both Jewish pride in Abraham and at the same time attacking the Augustan ideology. Both sides were summoned to a new household based only on faith.

⁷³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 386.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 386–7.

As noted in chapter one, the Augustan ideology—promulgated in the honorific inscriptions of the Greek East—was spread in the Latin West through the court propaganda of the imperial poets (Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and Propertius) and by means of the calendar of the Jupiter year. The legends of the imperial coinage, the famous Priene inscription, and the statuary at the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta also contributed powerfully to the aura of Augustus as the providential ruler of the entire Roman Empire. In reading Romans, we must remember that the Roman audience lived in the capital where the imperial ruler and his household lived. I content that Paul was demoting the elect status of the Roman ruler, and elevating God. In other words, God had established a counter-imperial household through the covenantal fatherhood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Rom 4:12, 16–7; 8:14–6, 19; 9:8, 10, 26). Consequently this divine rule culminated in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The theology of grace and faith becomes the center of Paul's gospel in his letter to the Romans. The theology of the Old and New Testaments seems to find its climax and fulfillment in Romans.

Paul strips away the ethnocentrism of the covenant theology of Second Temple Judaism so that Jewish and Gentile believers might understand their unity in Christ (Rom 10:12) and act non-judgmentally towards each other in a city that had become increasingly oppressive to those of no class and honor. Paul engages with theologies that undermine the priority of electing grace, whether through the Judaism represented by *Sirach* (15:4b and c) or through the status-riddled operations of the Greco-Roman reciprocity system (Rom 11:35; 13:8–10).⁷⁵ Thus, Paul helps the Gentile converts understand their place of honor in salvation history and enables established Jewish Christians, distressed by the impenitence of their Jewish brethren, to find comfort in God's grace in the life of the Jewish nation, both in the present and at the eschaton (Rom 11:1–6, 11–6, 23–32). Paul is also engaging the gospel of divine grace that had divided the East and West enthralled for eight decades by the time he was writing Romans.

In constructing an alternate symbolic universe based on faith and divine grace in Romans 9:11, Paul deconstructs the mythological universe of the ruler, thereby helping his audience see the emperor's

⁷⁵ See James Scott's "Hidden Transcripts to the New Testament Studies," in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott*, in *Semeia Studies* 48 (Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 79–91.

real status—clay in the potter’s hands (Rom 9:14–21) and a servant appointed by God (Rom 13:4). In Virgil, the emperor wields the sword to preserve power and reinforce his divine beneficence. Virgil’s works also provide detail about the relationship between the emperor and the gods. For example, Augustus chose to establish a universal empire to usher in the golden age that would extend to all nations.⁷⁶ Thus, Augustus made himself the representative of divine providence and the benefactor of the whole world.⁷⁷ Paul counters this ideology by presenting God as the benefactor of all people, especially those who walk in the footsteps of Abraham. Second, whereas Augustus is the “Father of the Country” (n. 115 *supra*: *pater et rector pater atque principes*), God established his own counter-imperial family who by faith have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their fathers (Rom 4:12, 16–7; 9:10).⁷⁸ Those who enter this family have the privilege of calling God “Abba, Father”—Jesus’s intimate address of God (Mark 14:36). People become members of this family through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:15); as God’s people, they are incorporated into this new community by grace (Rom 10:12; 11:5–6). In this case, grace became available to all people. For Paul, the grace of Christ continued to overflow into the international community of benefactors that Jesus established (Rom 5:17, 20; 2 Cor 4:15; 8:7; 9:8).⁷⁹

The last thing Paul does is to downgrade Augustus’s Jupiter-like status and his priestly role in the Roman cult (*Res Gestae* 7, 10) by demonstrating Jesus’s superior prophetic credentials (Rom 1:2–4; 16:25–7); his eternal deity and cosmic rule (Rom 8:18–21; 9:5; 15:13), his triumph over death and sin (Rom 5:12–6:10), and his continual intercession for his dependents before his Father in heaven (Rom 8:34). Seen against the backdrop of Augustus as divine benefactor, Paul’s new language of faith and grace dismantles the inflated claims of the imperial cult.

⁷⁶ Virgil, *Aeneid*, I. 286–91.

⁷⁷ Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 192.

⁷⁸ The title was bestowed on Augustus on 5 February 2 B.C. (*Res Gestae* 35; cf. Seutonius, *Aug.* 58). On the term ‘Father’ in its imperial context, see E. M. Lassen, “The Use of the Father Image in Imperial Propaganda and 1 Corinthians 4:14–21,” *TynBul* 42/1 (1991): 127–36, esp. 129–33. See also J. R. Hollingshed, *The Household of Caesar and the Body of Christ: A Political Interpretation of the Letters of Paul* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 136–7. The same idea is also found in J. L. White, *The Apostle of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 139–72.

⁷⁹ For a detailed analysis on grace, see James R. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace in its Greco-Roman Context* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2003), 226–88.

We discover that the phrase “in Christ” has an inclusive function for all who have the faith of Abraham. Jesus’s radical faithfulness revealed a new possibility of righteousness for all human beings (Jews and Greeks alike). “In Christ” is the state of those who heed the gospel’s call to leave the old world, and who belong to the new creation as long as they continue to be confronted with the Lord who justifies the ungodly.⁸⁰ The crucial issue in Rom 4:1–25 is not how Abraham was justified, but rather whose father he is and in what way his children are related. Second, the central goal is to reveal God as the Lord of all who have the faith of Abraham. The central thrust of Paul’s argument is to affirm that Abraham is the father of Jews and Gentiles alike, and that both are included vicariously in the blessing God pronounced upon him, a blessing which is said to apply to “all the nations.” In concluding this chapter, we will examine the nature of Abraham’s God, which the Enlightenment has obscured for the past 500 years, especially for inhabitants of Third-World nations.

God of Abraham in Romans

Having embarked on an effort to define faith and grace in the above section, we now need to briefly focus on the nature of God, Abraham, and faith as presented in the texts we have read thus far. We have seen that God’s relationship with Abraham can be described as complementary,⁸¹ on the basis that Abraham first received the call and accepted it. After accepting the call, he wandered under divine protection, and came to a land where he established a new *ethnos*. In other words, God’s relationship with Abraham established the foundation of a new identity.

God’s call of Abraham may be described as a divine strategy in the service of a universal purpose, namely the salvation of the world that had fallen under the sway of human ideologies (sin) and their disastrous effects.⁸² Abraham is an initially exclusive divine choice for the sake of

⁸⁰ Kasemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, 101.

⁸¹ A unique relationship is developed from the outset in Abraham’s call. See *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 9:1–10; 11:1–6, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 693.

⁸² For an elaborate exposition of God and Abraham, see Terence Fretheim, “Abraham, NT and Early Judaism,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, A–C*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 19–25.

a maximally inclusive end.⁸³ More so, God is identified as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, especially when God's abiding presence with his people is expressed (Matt 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:22ff; Acts 3:13; 7:32). Abraham is not just a paradigm of Christian faith, but also the symbol of future blessings for his true descendants.

Second, biological descent from Abraham is no reason for boasting in the Christian community; only the Spirit and faith in Christ lead to one's position before God (2 Cor 11:22). Abraham (the first proselyte) opened the way for all believers because he believed in God and trusted God's promises before he was circumcised (Rom 4:2, 12–25; Gal 3:6–8, 18). A similar motif is found in Hebrews 11:8–12, where Abraham is praised for his faith which led him to obey God's call, forsake his birth country, and wander under a divine promise of numerous descendants. In his wanderings, Abraham was shaped by facing and overcoming trials, making him the model of faith and steadfastness in trials. He is the ideal figure whose trust in God was immeasurable. Three things shaped this ancestor, namely faith, steadfastness, and righteousness as seen in his trust in God (*Jub.* 11:18–22; 19:8).

Having delineated the crucial aspects of Abraham, we will now examine Abraham's God and how this God can be the appropriate God for those who are under the ideological power of empires and are still struggling to define themselves within their own cultural contexts. Abraham's God is a down-to-earth God. In the *Apocalypse and Testament of Abraham*, God appears to Abraham in simple human terms, especially as God strikes up a conversation with Abraham. Secondly, this God appears at Abraham's tent door in the form of a human being and eats with him (Gen 18:1–2; *Testament of Abraham* 11 recession A). At every development, God speaks with Abraham about the future of humanity and especially about the future of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16–32). The God of Abraham seriously respects human participation, engaging what Abraham says and does. In other words, the God of Abraham is not far out there, but is close to his people and approachable by all.

Third, Abraham's God is not an imperial figure, but is transcendent as well as immanent. In their complementary relationship, God and Abraham promise to honor each other in ways that put the entire universe first. God calls Abraham to a universal responsibility—all fami-

⁸³ Ibid.

lies of the earth are the focus of God's interest. God has all nations in view and his purposes encompass every creature on earth. The God of Abraham seeks a relationship based on trust, and his words have power to change lives and worlds forever.

A postcolonial notion apparent in the Old Testament God is that he interacts with outsiders—the powerless, such as Hagar (Gen 16:7–14) and Abimelech (Gen 20:3–6). This is also true of Abraham; after being called by God, he encounters foreigners—Canaanites, Egyptians, Hagar, Hittites, Aramaeans, other empires such as Sodom and Gomorrah, and pre-Israelite rulers of Jerusalem (Gen 16:7–14; 20:10–20; 21:9, 18–9; 21:22–34; 19:37–8; 25:1–18). This encompassing experience is a confirmation of Abraham's blessing that he will be a "father of many nations" and a blessing to many. All the foreigners react positively to Abraham. Of special interest to me is Melchizedek, who blesses Abraham on God's behalf (Gen 14). Not only that, but we also have Abimelech, who exemplifies fear of God in a manner that calls Abraham to account for his deeds; he also served as Abraham's confessor (Gen 20).

The God of Abraham makes promises—promises that prompt Abraham to have faith. It is from these divine promises that Abraham's life and that of his future descendants is shaped (Gen 12:1–3). The promises are also available to outsiders if they share Abraham's faith. It is interesting to note that the promises made to Abraham include five basic features that are relevant to a person's spirituality and faith. First, we have the promise of a son through whom Abraham's name and fame will be continued. This promise gave Abraham's life a sense of direction and shaped his dreams for the future. In African cultures, a son provides one with a sense of continuity and a fulfillment of hopes and dreams.

Second, Abraham is promised a land where he can solidify his identity. Third, Abraham receives the promise to be a blessing to all nations, and to have a name and descendants. Fourth, the legacy of Abraham includes not only Jews, but also Christians (Rom 4) and Muslims, who track their descentance through Hagar and Ishmael. The Qur'an has more than 250 references to Abraham. The Jewish nation (both Christian and non-Christian) has an ethnic claim to Abraham. Each of the promises is encompassed with a blessing and the presence of God himself. The promise of a blessing to Abraham and Sarah signifies an ongoing presence of the divine in their lives (Gen 12:1–3; 17:16, 7–8). In chapter 17:7–8, God declares an oath saying; "I will be God to you and to your descendants after you."

It is crucial for us to qualify Abraham's trust and obedience. Abraham's trust at every turn was necessary in order for God's purposes to move forward in and through him. The faith of Abraham and the faithfulness of God shaped the entire human order. This, as we said above, is a relationship of mutual dependence. For example, Abraham's intercessory advocacy on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah can easily be viewed as a sign of mutual trust between God and Abraham. In fact, the relationship presented in all the narratives clearly shows that Abraham was a "friend of God" (Isa 41:8; 2 Chr 20:7; Jas 2:23). God himself declares that "Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen 26:3–5, 25). In all the narratives, we discover that Abraham is not a passive figure, as if the drama were solely shaped by God's will and word. The questioning and reactions of Abraham and Sarah illustrate the depth of God's engagement with and commitment to human beings as instruments of the divine purpose.

Lastly, Abraham's faith can be described as 'resurrection faith.' Against challenges, Abraham continued to believe in God. In a situation beyond all human hope, long past the time when Abraham and Sarah could conceive, they both believed 'in hope' that God's promise would be fulfilled, thus exemplifying the depth of their trust in God.⁸⁴ In challenging situations the creature is overpowered, held and sustained by God's grace and our response to this grace is what faith entails. Paul believed that something decisive had happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and found the paradigm of that event in Abraham.

The faith that Paul is lifting up is not that of an individual believer; rather, it is the faith of a community, which will in turn bring salvation to the entire universe. Through faith, Paul reasserts the impartiality of God, an impartiality that began with Abraham and found its climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Abraham and Jesus Christ established a new lineage whose identity is shaped by grace and faith. Both Jews and Gentiles hold the status of heirs and are able to receive grace. In turn, they should recognize their kinship by manifesting the characteristics of their ancestors. In a word, faith and grace have a reconciling effect, and this should be extended to all nations.

⁸⁴ For an in-depth elaboration of this faith, see Robert Jewett, *Romans*, 334–43.

CONCLUSION

An Integrative Cross-Cultural Hermeneutic: Implications and Limitations

In concluding this book, I wish to focus on two main areas, namely the new discovery of a cross-cultural hermeneutic and the implications of this hermeneutic as it competes with Western modes of biblical interpretation. I have attempted to show how Paul creatively appropriated ancient cultural modes to communicate the gospel to his audience. My use of cross-cultural hermeneutics has demonstrated the complementary nature of culture and the gospel. We modern day Bible readers must make explicit the role of our contextual and hermeneutical/theological frames in our choice of biblical interpretation. Thus, any biblical interpretation should endeavor to use language, images, and ideas that make sense to indigenous populaces.

In terms of new discovery, cross-cultural hermeneutics admonishes New Testament readers to be culturally sensitive. Any meaningful exegesis should attempt to express the gospel in a way familiar to the people. Cross-cultural hermeneutics is not just desirable; it is the only morally acceptable exegetical method. We must realize that, whatever gifts we received from the Reformation and the Enlightenment, we cannot simply transfer these interpretations of Scripture into a new cultural setting without considering how they might need to be contextualized. A good example can be drawn from Robert Jewett's *Hermeneia Commentary on Romans*. The commentary is an amazing treasure for research, with insightful exegesis of each pericope. Yet, the commentary may be criticized from a cultural perspective because it lacks a contextual frame of reference. In our reading of the Bible we need to acknowledge positively and explicitly the role of our contextual and hermeneutical concerns, as these are the concerns of all faith traditions.¹

¹ Pauline epistles and gospels are cultural products that varied greatly in character and definition during the first Christian century. The gospel message was to a greater extent shaped by the culture of the Mediterranean world, which Paul creatively appropriated to present his gospel message. For a detailed reading of these cultural issues,

Second, cross-cultural hermeneutics allows us to see for the first time the political, social, economic, religious, and cultural composition of the early Christian audience and how this diverse world shaped the gospel. Personally, my study of the Greco-Roman world helped me process my own Zimbabwean experience, since much of what occurred in the Augustan Age was similar to my own colonial experience. Third-World exegesis has much to learn from the ways that Paul appropriated concepts and images from the Greco-Roman world to tailor the gospel message for his audience. Some of Paul's language was biblical and traditional, which he recast for new circumstances. Some of the images were creatively drawn from everyday political and cultural realities of the Augustan period. Both forms of appropriation are urgently needed in this postmodern and postcolonial world. The issue of community building is of paramount importance.

A biblical metaphor like *reconciliation*, which focuses on restoring broken relationships, connects with the experience of a wide range of people. It speaks with a clarion voice to the increasingly postmodern Euro-American context in which I now live, where people deeply long for community and authentic relationships.² Among the tribal people of Zimbabwe, the hunger for community is strong because both colonial domination and missionary Christianity divided families. The former strongly emphasized political rules aimed at dividing and conquering. The latter (i.e., missionary education and Christianity) emphasized individual salvation and a class system. All this was contrary to the cultural, religious, and political experience of the indigenous people. Thus, cross-cultural hermeneutics seeks to redress the damages inflicted by colonial administrators and the earliest missionary groups. Ancestor language, for example, evoked deep religious and political associations for ancient Mediterraneans, as it still does in many Third-World cultures today. However, that same language needs careful translation for many contemporary Westerners, for whom ancestors could refer to founders such as Thomas Jefferson for Americans and Winston Churchill for the British.

see Yeo Khiok-khng, ed., *Navigating Romans* (see chap. 1, n. 41). See also Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

² For new insights into the urgent need for relationships, see, Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

As Christians seek a language in which to communicate the gospel within specific contexts, fresh images are needed to relate the gospel to life as people experience it. Paul accomplishes this in Romans 4, where he elevates Abraham as the ancestor of all peoples of faith.³ From a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective, ancestors are not meant to separate humanity; rather, they show that diversity should not be avoided, but accepted as a gift. When we hear the gospel being sung in its various harmonies, we can discern more fully the richness of the word of God. At the same time we should not forget that diversity raises a lot of questions such as: What holds these variegated cultures together? Second, how do we know which contextual expressions are authentic and which have distorted the gospel? These questions are for readers to wrestle with, but we know for sure that all peoples can be held together by faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead. The next two sections will explore the implications and limitations of cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Implications of Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics

In this book we have shown that cross-cultural hermeneutics allows indigenous people to be the subjects of biblical interpretation. In other words, it empowers lay and uneducated people to participate in biblical interpretation. We observed in the methodology section that Western methods of reading the Bible are intellectual and individualistic in nature. On the other hand, cross-cultural readings value the culture and experiences of indigenous people, hence making Third-World readings existential and pragmatic in nature and contextual in approach.⁴ Thus, the gospel for an African audience is not just a story—it is a way of living.

Paul interpreted the death and resurrection of Jesus in concrete terms such as reconciliation, liberation from sin and domination, the gift of the spirit, and love. These notions flow out of the narrative of God's gracious and loving acts of salvation first announced to Abraham and fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When

³ See chapters two and three of this book where the concept is well defined and elaborated.

⁴ See Ukpong, "Inculturation Hermeneutics," 17 (see chap. 1, n. 3). See also Daniel Patte, ed., *Global Commentary on Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

Shona Christians confess that there is one God and that Jesus Christ is Lord, they mean that in existential terms. This confession excludes all other loyalties and deposes all idols. As an ancestor, Jesus becomes the ground of hope and the anchor of African souls. Thus, the gospel of Jesus announces in the first place a living story, not a cluster of abstract theological doctrines.

Second, existential readings of the Bible allow Third-World readers to engage the gospel in a way that shapes their own contexts and stories of survival and oppression under the British flag. In other words, Christians affirm that the biblical story of God's saving purpose (fulfilled in Jesus Christ) is truly a meta-narrative—a story that gives authentic meaning to all reality and all of human history. Thus, if it is a meta-narrative (a story of stories), then we should be able to place our own stories of oppression within salvation stories and find our own perception and experience of the world transformed by the connection. Instead of standing outside the story to analyze it and then apply it to our context, the gospel invites us to become a part of the biblical story. By entering into the salvation story, people will abandon competing narratives—stories of idolatry and oppression, greed and corruption, power and domination, despair and self-destruction. Cross-cultural hermeneutics asks that we respect differences and allow peoples of the world to live as brothers and sisters.

The third implication is that cross-cultural hermeneutics focuses more on unity in the midst of diversity. The gospel of Jesus Christ draws nations to the shared understanding of our faith in Jesus. The story is bigger than any particular cultural expression of it. Differences can be transcended only if benevolence with regard to customs and opinions presents itself as an indifference that tolerates differences, one whose sole material test lies, as Paul say, in being able and knowing how to practice oneself. Differences, like instrumental tones, provide us with the recognizable univocity that makes up the melody of truth. In fact, differences are complementary tools that enrich our diversity and make each of us a unique creation. Stories are basic to human experience, and every culture has stories, proverbs, myths, and metaphors that help people understand and order their world. African ancestral stories can act as cultural bridges to link the larger biblical story with the African's own life experience. Ancestral stories are important for communicating the gospel in predominantly oral cultures like those of Zimbabwe and other Third-World cultures.

Cross-cultural hermeneutics confronts us with the truth that there will never be a culture-free gospel. When the gospel enters a particular culture, the essence of its message must be presented in a way that resonates with the indigenous people. In Gentile communities, the gospel was not told in Jewish terms but was propagated in ways that made sense within the cultural world of the audience.⁵ The gospel was still in some ways an alien story yet it engaged the world of the Hellas. While the gospel was at home in Greco-Roman cultures, it was also alien. The kinds of cultural engagement we discover in the New Testament can serve as precedents for how biblical interpreters respond to various facets of our diverse cultures.

In Acts 17, we find Paul respecting and listening to Athenian culture by drawing upon its language, images, and literary forms and concepts to tell the gospel story in a way that would positively impact his audience. Biblical interpreters and scholars must look for ways to use the internal resources of a culture to connect the biblical story to particular cultural stories. This is the strongest contribution of cross-cultural hermeneutics. The resources of a particular culture play a strong complementary role to the gospel.

However, cross-cultural hermeneutics calls us to be discerning as to when to affirm the culture and when to confront it, when to participate and when to withdraw. I admit that this is not a simple task but it is a necessary endeavor. As a preacher in a foreign culture, I find myself challenged to combine my culture with Western culture, and in some cases the balance is hard to achieve. In any case, wherever the gospel is contextualized, it will expose oppressive and sinful elements in every culture. I know in Africa witchcraft and sorcery are still widespread, as well as the cult of the evil eye, endemic bribery and corruption, cultural oppression of woman, and AIDS and HIV, all of which are harmful to human life. The gospel must confront all these evil practices so that salvation can become an existential practice. In Romans and Luke-Acts we see how Paul and Luke engaged the cultural conventions of benefaction and patronage in order to transform them. The gospel, if well interpreted, can liberate people from the chains of manipulation; unequal relationships; and the exploitation of the poor,

⁵ See John Pairman Brown, *Ancient Israel and Ancient Greece: Religion, Politics, and Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 1–48, 49–80, 177–200.

women, and children. When this happens, Christ is incarnated afresh within our global world.

Cross-cultural hermeneutics, as used throughout this book, calls for a balance between formulating the gospel in terms of two cultural worlds and calling aspects of those worlds into question in order to reform them. In the case of the Shona culture, we can cite such things as African oral narrative genre, art, values, and symbols. Any reading of texts should take into account peoples' sociocultural context and worldview as the framework and background against which the text is interpreted. The text must be interpreted from the perspective of the people's context and reflect their concerns, values, and interpretative frame of reference.

Today it is possible to lose this balance in either direction. When we become too much at home in our culture we can begin to transform the gospel in light of cultural values instead of the reverse. The 'gospel of health and wealth' that is promoted from many North American pulpits and propagated over the global media is an especially blatant example of such an uncritical accommodation of culture. In a word, prosperity gospel is syncretism dressed in a Sunday garment. This gospel divides people along economic lines, consequently destroying the fabric of communion and community. On the other hand, failing to tell and live out the sacred story in forms that reflect and speak to a given culture trivializes the 'good news' and causes people to perceive it as irrelevant. Every interpreter and communicator of the gospel must strive to enable the Word of God (which was incarnated within a particular ancient culture) to speak in ways that are relevant to today's cultures while still remaining faithful to the biblical message. Thus, cross-cultural hermeneutics requires that Bible readers and interpreters be very creative. In a multicultural and pluralistic world, biblical exegesis should attempt to show respect for the particular cultural identities of audiences.

The gospel should not be misused to recruit believers to a particular cultural form of Christianity; rather, it should allow people to do exegesis and live out their faith within their own culture. At the same time, the gospel seeks to relativize all cultures and demolish the old lines of division and ethnocentrism in favor of a "common identity in Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:34–5; Gal 3:26–8; Rom 4:24–5; Col 3:11). This common identity is the transforming nature of the gospel. In the cross-cultural setting in which I currently work and worship, I am learning that the gospel does not erase our differences. Instead, it chal-

lenges people to lay aside their particular cultural preferences and their ethnocentric perspectives in order to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

In the midst of massive globalization, cross-cultural hermeneutics stands to oppose the dominance of the Western voice and seeks to empower the voices of the traditionally marginalized peoples. When faith is genuinely contextualized, the shame and stigma imposed on oppressed people begins to be lifted. Thus, oppressed voices begin to find a new dignity as they see not only their own lives but also their culture in God’s redeeming light. A context-based gospel allows people to hear the gospel in their own language; it connects with their symbols, addresses their needs, and awakens their creative energies.

Globalization was reversed on the day of Pentecost, when local languages and identities were affirmed within the context of the new unified community of faith (Acts 2:1–13). Both Acts and Romans uphold the theological and cultural integrity of all peoples. This is an important implication for our time, especially in an age of increasing world tension and terrorism.

We must stress that cross-cultural hermeneutics focuses not only on the local culture, but is also transcultural⁶ in that it allows various contextual insights and interpretations of the gospel to contribute toward a richer, fuller, more adequate grasp of God’s word and its implications for all peoples. The call is to form a global interpretive community, whereby the whole world takes the role of both teacher and learner interacting with one another. The book of Acts provides a good example of transcultural presentations of the gospel. The encounter between the kosher Peter and the Gentile ‘outsider’ Cornelius transformed both their theological visions (Acts 10–11). In the Jerusalem Council, the church functioned as an intercultural hermeneutical community (Acts 15). The outcome was a new and fuller understanding of the Spirit’s work. Paul’s interaction with the pagan cultural and religious world in Athens (Acts 17) undoubtedly deepened his own understanding of the gospel and how to proclaim it. The same encounter occurs in Romans 4, where we see Paul appropriating the gospel in the language familiar to his Augustan audience.

⁶ ‘Transcultural’ in this book refers to the centrality of every culture in contributing to a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted wisdom of God. The term also encompasses the complementarity of cultures in shaping the appropriation of the gospel.

Lastly, a new insight provided by this study is that Shona Christians can help correct North American interpretations of Scripture that reflect an unbiblical individualism. Believers from shame-based cultures of the Third World have a clearer insight into the meaning of the cross as God's ultimate identification with human shame, leading to freedom from shame's fear and exclusion. Shona Christians can contribute rich insights into the role of genealogies because they live in a culture that has a deeper regard for kinship and ancestral traditions. Cross-cultural hermeneutics promotes a Catholic spirit, whereby each culture assumes a humble posture through which one can listen to the others. Each culture needs to be checked and challenged by the others so as to present the gospel in its multitextured expression. When this happens, three things will take place, namely community, story, and imagination.

Living the gospel in a cross-cultural manner gives birth to a genuine community and connectedness. In this case, women, men, the poor, and the rich will be invited to participate in this community. Genuine loving relationships will give Jesus's message a stamp of authenticity. This dovetails closely with Acts 2:43–7, which relates the story of a church whose loving embodiment of the gospel and care for one another became a primary model of a genuine faith community. Second, the story of Jesus is the life-yielding story of a compassionate God who repeatedly chooses and uplifts the lowly. It is a story centered in the humility, shame, and vulnerability of the cross (1 Cor 1:18–2:3; Phil 2:6–8).

A proper postcolonial gospel presentation will invite people to see the world through the biblical story and to allow that story to reshape their lives. It will also lead Third-World readers and interpreters to communicate the gospel through telling their own stories with vulnerability and integrity, as recipients of the compassion and transforming grace of God.

Imagination brings into focus the power of cultural metaphors and symbols. These are frequently used in the gospel to supplement verbal communication with various forms of audio, visual, and interactive media, ceremony, and the arts. The story of Jesus is a buffet of imagination, and Africans excel at imaginative gospel presentations. Abraham's story is rich with metaphors and symbols. Story, song, and image can become points of contact for exploring the big issues of life without compromising the integrity of the gospel. We are currently

witnessing a massive shift in the center of gravity of global Christianity from the North to the South. The majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. One reason may be that these cultures have seen the value of interweaving their own stories of oppression, suffering, and liberation with the stories of Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection.

If we are to fulfill our calling as biblical interpreters we must appropriate the gospel in the ways we see modeled in Romans and the stories of the New Testament. We must be sensitive to the needs and values of other cultures. Authentic biblical interpretation is incarnational and cruciform. Our interpretation and communication of the gospel must assume a posture of complementarity—an attitude of self-giving love and humble identification with other cultures. Our interpretation of texts must be more than relevant; it must be real. An interpretation that reduces the gospel to marketing a religious product or that imposes a foreign ideology on a less powerful culture has little to do with the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus.

Every interpreter must remember that the 'Church' is of God, and God continually prevents our foolishness and failures from harming His Church. The Holy Spirit—who led Abraham, Jesus Christ, and the New Testament church—will continue to inspire new appropriations of the gospel in the world today. All of our efforts to do cross-cultural hermeneutics have little value unless the Spirit is our source of wisdom and power. A cross-cultural hermeneutic, like any other hermeneutic, takes a prayerful mind and a humble heart. The approach I have advocated in this book is one that seeks to listen and be patient with each other's cultures, so as to sing our genealogical stories in new melodies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbreviations

1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
3 Macc.	3 Maccabees
4 Macc.	4 Maccabees
Sir.	Sirach
JTSoA	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
AFER	<i>African Ecclesiastical Review</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
Eph.	<i>Ephesians</i>
1-2 Cor.	<i>1-2 Corinthians</i>
TCJ	<i>The Classical Journal</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal of the Study of Judaism</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Religion in Africa</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Religious Studies</i>
JRomS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JSNTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the new Testament Supplement Series</i>
LBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
LSJ	<i>Liddle—Scott—Jones, Greek-English Lexicon</i>
LXX	<i>Septuagint</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
Rom.	<i>Romans</i>
SBL	<i>Society of Biblical Literature</i>
SBLDS	<i>SBL Dissertations Series</i>
ZJL	<i>Zambezi Journals and Letters</i>
GLAJJ	<i>Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism</i>
TPAPA	<i>Transitions and Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association</i>
Tyn Bul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>

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